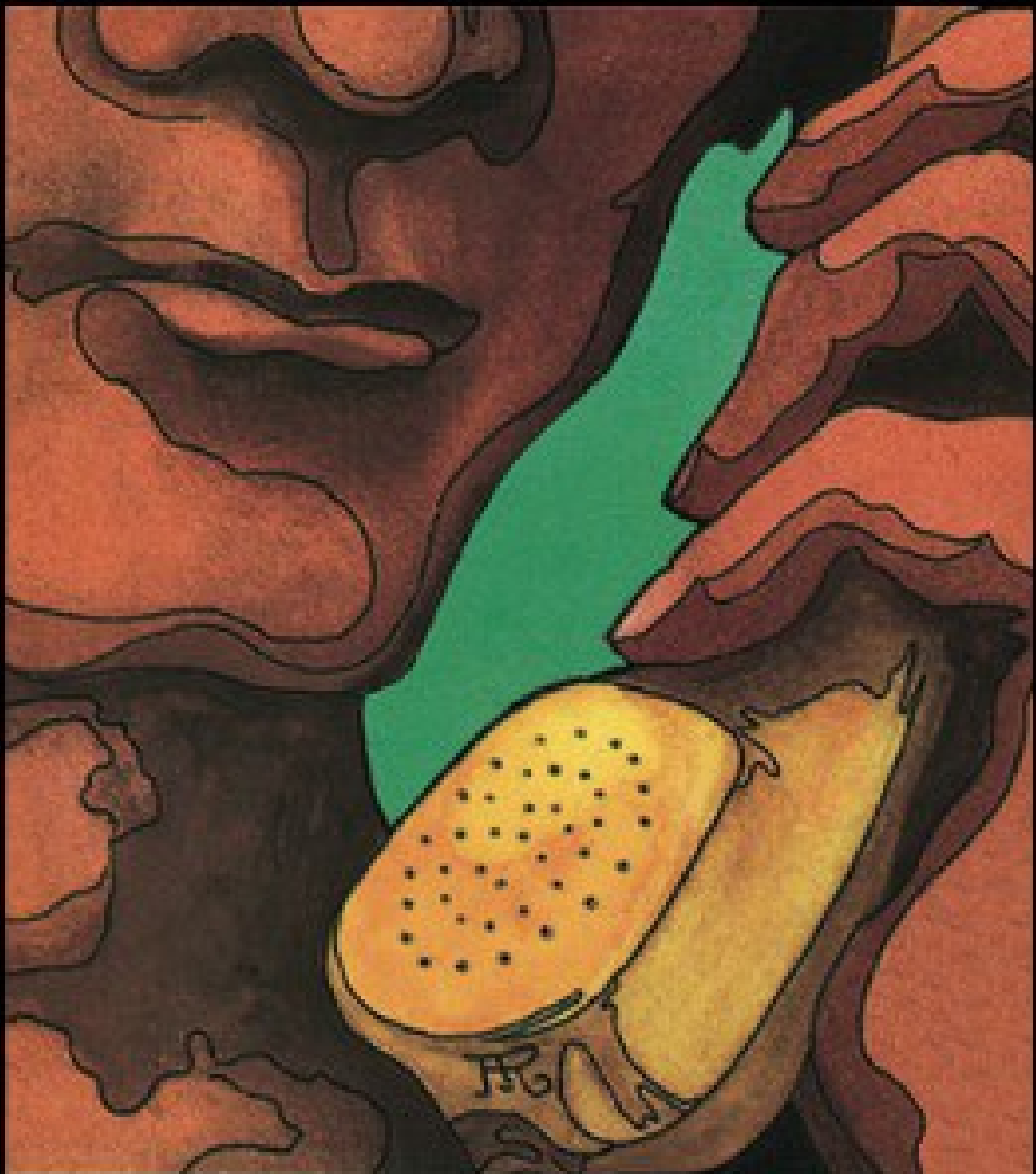


THE
INVESTIGATORS
in

**THE MYSTERY OF THE
WATER BLACKMAIL**





in

**THE MYSTERY
OF THE
WATER BLACKMAIL**

The Three Investigators—Jupiter, Pete and Bob—are in the sleepy tourist city of Sedona for a music festival. Suddenly, the news come in that a blackmailer wants \$250,000 else the drinking water in Sedona will be poisoned. This will cause a huge problem as many tourists are there for the festival. The police are at a loss. The three detectives take on the case and soon get into dicey situations. However, they need to track down the blackmailer fast as time is running out!

The Three Investigators
in
The Mystery of the Water Blackmail

*Original German text by
Brigitte Johanna Henkel-Waidhofer*

*Based on characters created by
Robert Arthur*

Translated, adapted, and edited from:

Die drei ???: Giftiges Wasser

(The Three ???: Toxic Water)

by

Brigitte Johanna Henkel-Waidhofer

(1993)

Cover art by

Aiga Rasch

(2020-04-04)

(2020-10-23)

Contents

- 1. A Momentous Fall**
- 2. Surprise at the Airport**
- 3. In the Shadow of the Red Rocks**
- 4. Sedona is Being Blackmailed**
- 5. A Cocky Press Officer**
- 6. Who is Adeline Hancock?**
- 7. Time is Running Out**
- 8. Attack in the Cotton Field?**
- 9. A Journalist has Disappeared**
- 10. Jupiter Behaves Strangely**
- 11. The Blackmailer's Letter**
- 12. The Circumflex**
- 13. A Hopi Indian Breaks Her Silence**
- 14. On the Right Track**
- 15. Appointment with a Blackmailer**
- 16. The Fax Transmission Log**
- 17. The Dirty Business with Water**
- 18. A Bluff is Successful**

1. A Momentous Fall

Jupiter Jones rode at a brisk pace out of the shadow of a man-sized oleander. Unexpectedly, the afternoon sun hit him full in the face. Irritated, he blinked and only saw the gravel on the side of the uphill road when his rear wheel slipped off. He plunged towards the ground, retracted his head just in time but hit his right shoulder on the hard, dry ground.

Jupe watched his bike in disbelief as it skidded across the road for a few more metres, causing small clouds of dust to rise. It was like in the movies, he thought, while his own slide was not yet over. When his fall was stopped by an obstacle shortly afterwards, there was no more than two hand-widths between his face and a cactus.

“What a bummer,” grumbled the First Investigator. After a few moments of shock, he slowly picked himself up. He was on his way home from high school and was supposed to help Uncle Titus for a quarter of an hour at the salvage yard.

Involuntarily he reached his hand to his injured shoulder—and felt a stabbing pain. “Ow!” he shouted, startled.

He looked at his palm in disbelief, which was also hurting now. Three spikes, which reminded him of Aunt Mathilda’s embroidery needles, stuck in his skin. Jupiter pulled a face and gritted his teeth. Carefully he pulled out the spikes one by one. A little dazed he shook his head and threw a wry look at his right shoulder. Spikes there too. It was no use. He moaned and carefully moved his shoulder. But then he was relieved. Nothing seemed to be dislocated or broken.

After a few breaths he got himself up awkwardly and went over to his bike. It had survived the fall better than its owner. The chain was where it belonged, nothing had bent, only on the handle bars were two new scratches.

Undecidedly he rose—and almost instantaneously, his knees buckled and he crumpled down onto the ground. One knee seemed to be soft like butter and the other seemed to tremble like aspen leaves. In any case, they were both unsuitable for cycling. Jupiter sighed and began to push his bike up the hill.

When he turned into The Jones Salvage Yard twenty minutes later, he still felt quite shaky. He saw Pete’s MG at once. That’s all he needed—first the fall, then the cacti and now the grin that his friend would put on in a moment. Jupe leaned his bike against the high wooden fence that surrounded the area and shuffled to the old mobile home trailer where The Three Investigators had set up their headquarters.

Pete just jumped out the door of the trailer and was heading for his car when he saw his friend. “Hey,” he shouted. “You’re finally here! We’ve been looking all over for you.”

“I had...” Jupiter started speaking, but Pete wouldn’t let him continue.

“We have a weekend job. Hurry, we have to be at the airport in Camarillo in an hour.”

“May I ask...” Jupiter tried to interrupt Pete a second time.

“Not now,” he shook his head so sharply that his brown hair fell into his face, “I must hurry home and pack my things.” Pete walked briskly to his car. “Bring three pairs of socks, we won’t be back until Tuesday.” Suddenly he hesitated and threw a surprised look at Jupiter. “What happened to you?”

“I had...”

“Tell me later.” Pete was unstoppable. “I’ll be back to pick you up in twenty minutes.” He jumped into the driver’s seat and drove away waving.

Jupiter watched him unbelievably and tried to put his thoughts in order. It was Thursday, and someone wanted them to work until Tuesday. He liked the prospect of flying away to an unknown destination. Unfortunately it did not alleviate the pain that had settled in his shoulder. He was agitated.

He went into the trailer, dropped into the chair and took a breather. After a few minutes, he picked himself up, pulled one of the T-shirts they had kept in the cupboard for emergencies and went back outside to put the bike in the shed.

There he disregarded the new delivery of used goods which Uncle Titus had bought in Ventura that morning. He would have to deal with it soon enough. Jupiter was responsible for keeping the inventory of the stock that his uncle bought for re-sale later.

Many years ago, Titus Jones had started a salvage yard and over time, he made it to be the largest one in Rocky Beach. He didn’t just deal with scrap metals and the like, but expanded his trade into buying and selling anything from used household items to works of art. His business even attracted antique collectors.

After he had locked the shed again and hidden the key in the gutter, Jupiter walked across the salvage yard to the house. No sign of Uncle Titus.

Along the way, he saw old ceramic tubes that were stacked up to form a pyramid, washbasins scattered around, some iron girders from a factory that had just been demolished and three dozen lamps from a stadium floodlighting system were now dismantled for sale. The lamps were a big hit. Three of them had gone to the old City Hall of Rocky Beach, some others had landed in the gardens of distinguished villa owners.

At the door, Jupiter felt the pain in his shoulder and hand when knocked. He tried to keep a cheerful face. Aunt Mathilda would not be fooled by pain or illnesses, even if they were trivial. But now, that was immediately clear to Jupiter that he had to find out what his excursion was all about. So he firmly resolved to keep the fall and the pain to himself for the time being.

“I finished packing your duffel bag. It’s so lucky you’re out of school tomorrow.” Aunt Mathilda came towards him laughing. “Are you happy?”

“Of course,” he replied, “Only that I don’t know exactly what I should be happy about.”

“Didn’t Pete tell you?” Aunt Mathilda said.

“Oh, yeah?” Jupe shook his head in confusion. “Something about going to an airport for a weekend job and that we’re in a hurry.”

“You are to go to Sedona for a music festival. A friend of Sax Sendler is shooting a TV documentary there and needs help. Sendler asked Bob if you’d like to fill in. There is even a plane ready for aerial photography. You can fly to Sedona with it. Sendler’s on the plane. Bob and Pete’s parents don’t mind either.” Aunt Mathilda broke off and looked at her nephew questioningly.

The situation was immediately clear to Jupiter. Sax Sendler was a talent agent, and has a music agency where Bob Andrews, the specialist in research for The Three Investigators, worked part-time. Sendler knew many interesting people. If he offered you a job, Jupiter thought, you should accept it. And if he now asked for iodine and spoke about cacti, Aunt Mathilda would put her foot down and he would have to stay at home.

“Is something wrong?” Aunt Mathilda’s face lost some of its radiance.

“No, nothing at all,” he pointed out. “I just... I just... I got angry with Pete because he didn’t give me the details.” He tried to grin. “Great, isn’t it?” he said, still a little shaky.

“Yeah, really, I’m really happy for you. You don’t go to Arizona every day and then by plane. Titus already knows.” She sent Jupiter a punishing look. “He’ll have to wait until you come back to do the inventory.” His aunt laughed. “Never mind. He has instead set out for a new haul.”

She turned around and marched into the kitchen. Apparently she hadn’t noticed anything unusual about her nephew. He followed her around slowly.

“Here I made you some sandwiches. Who knows when you’ll get something to eat.” She looked at Jupiter closely. “Take care of yourself, so I don’t have to worry about you!”

The First Investigator nodded. He felt joy slowly creeping up on him. “I take care of myself around the clock,” he said. “Besides, I have two bodyguards.”

Suddenly, Pete’s car horn sounded from outside. Jupiter grabbed his duffel bag and barely escaped the aunt’s friendly pat on the right shoulder. As a substitute he gave her a kiss on the cheek and ran out of the house.

“I’ll call you when we get there,” he shouted to drown out Bob and Pete’s greeting cries. They waved and Aunt Mathilda waved back.

Bob wanted to be praised for helping the other two make the trip. Pete already made detailed plans for the evening in the strange city. He thought he was quite irresistible, and when his girlfriend Kelly was not around, he liked to flirt with other girls.

Gradually Jupe let himself be infected by the anticipation of his two friends. And when they arrived at the Camarillo airport twenty minutes later, he had almost forgotten his mishap of the afternoon.

2. Surprise at the Airport

Pete found a covered car park near the terminal building.

“Follow me,” Bob took command as a matter of course. Casually, with his black sunglasses on his blond hair, he leaned against the car and waited until Pete took out the luggage and locked the car. In a single file, they trotted into the tiny, not exactly elegant building.

“Over there.” Pete was the first to spot the small group. Two young women and a not-so-young, rather wiry man, armed with a camera, cable reels, a tripod and two video lights, stood at one side. They went up to the man.

“Good afternoon,” said Jupe. “We are the boys Sax Sendler sent.”

“And we are from NTV,” the man replied friendly and shook his hand. Then he turned to the blonde woman standing behind him. “This is Jean Baxter. She’s the reporter, and our boss.”

“Hi,” greeted the three of them, somewhat embarrassed. Jupiter had to think of Lys. She would have given him a rebuke now, because without much thinking he had simply assumed that the boss was the man.

“This is Chelsea Smith, the camerawoman,” continued the man, “and my name is Simon Hoover. I’m in charge of sound.”

“Did Sax tell you what it’s about?” Jean Baxter wanted to know.

“Very briefly,” Bob replied. “Where is he, anyway?”

“He has to go to some concert in Lancaster tonight—a last minute thing, so he’s not coming after all,” said the reporter. “Follow me.” She looked at her trendy watch. “We have fifteen minutes left. There’s a little snack bar over there, we can talk things over.”

They deposited their luggage at the counter of their airline and went to the other end of the hall. From behind, Jupiter took a closer look at her employer. Jean was tall and a bit chubby, which he liked at first sight, and wore a long dark blond braid. Chelsea was smaller, had a strikingly slim, long neck and her hair was hidden under a crooked baseball cap. Simon looked like a mountain climber. Even by Californian standards, he was extremely tanned.

Jean Baxter put on a beaming smile. “I’ll give you a treat... unless, of course, you’re ordering a four-course meal.”

“Certainly not,” Pete promised. “And I’ll be the waiter. What drinks would you all like to have? Iced tea for everyone, okay?”

“Well,” Jean began when Pete came back with six full glasses on a tray. “We have been commissioned to make a TV documentary about this year’s music festival.”

“We already know.” Bob got a little cocky and got a stern look from Jupiter.

“It’s not only about the music scene and the audience,” continued Jean, “but also about what such a festival means economically for a small town. It’s not only what comes in from the overnight stays and entrance fees, but also what it costs to dispose of the piles of garbage left behind, for example.”

Finally, she gave her instructions. “One of you will help me with my notes, write down names, addresses and keywords when I do interviews. The others will be messengers, cable carriers and lighting men. And if we get hungry, you can bring food.” For a brief moment she

looked down. "I know twenty-five dollars a day isn't exactly rosy, but you live for free. And you can fly back and forth. Okay?"

They nodded. "And where do we live?" Pete wanted to know.

"At the youth hostel. We're across the street in a motel." Jean looked at her watch again. "We have to go. On the plane, I'll give you the day's schedule for tomorrow so you know what to expect."

A tall man in a blue pilot's shirt approached her. "Captain Payton of Eagle Air," he said. In doing so, he too turned to Simon as well. Jupiter had to grin and Jean winked at him. Then she reached for her bag and stood up.

The luggage was already stacked on a cart. They followed Payton to the airfield. Two dozen small airplanes were in parking position. The Captain pointed to a Cessna, which was decorated with a striking gold stripe. They stowed away the duffel bags, the cable reels and the tripod and climbed into the cabin. Chelsea took the camera on her lap, Jean and Simon each held a video light.

Payton introduced them to his co-pilot. They had to fasten their seat belts, then the propellers were started.

Jupe looked over at Bob and Pete. Both of them had enthusiasm written all over their faces. They had only flown in such a small airplane once.

"Are you afraid?" Pete hissed at the First Investigator. "You look so funny."

"Nonsense," Jupiter said. He really wasn't afraid of flying. However, his shoulder pains reappeared, and he hoped fervently that none of the spikes had broken off when he pulled out.

"Here we go," the pilot tore him from his thoughts. Jupiter decided to enjoy the flight first and pressed himself deep into his seat.

They were taxiing to the runway. The airplane stopped briefly before accelerating. Jupiter looked outside. The planes standing on the ground whizzed past, then the terminal building, the car park, before they took off.

Pete raised his thumb up in high spirits. Jean Baxter turned to The Three Investigators. "I hope you'll enjoy the flight," she said laughing. "I know I will. I love to fly."

"Me too," Chelsea shouted. With a saucy gesture, she took off her cap. Long red curls sprang up underneath. Pete, who was sitting on a single seat diagonally in front of Jupiter, got round eyes in admiration.

They made a big loop over the small airfield. They could see the Santa Monica Mountains and the Pacific Ocean before the plane turned northeast.

"We're flying a bit towards Bakersfield now," shouted Captain Payton over his shoulder to the rear, "and then north of Edwards towards the Mojave Desert. If we're lucky, we'll see the Colorado all the way to Lake Mead."

The houses below got smaller and smaller. And the higher they climbed, the more the highway system around Los Angeles resembled an octopus that had its arms clawed into the landscape. The roadways, six, even eight lanes wide, stretched across the countryside. When the Cessna went into a curve, Jupiter could clearly see State Route 1. After a quarter of an hour, the 'Fasten Seat Belt' sign went out with a small bell.

"If you look ahead now," cried the pilot, "you can see the Mojave Desert on the horizon." As if on command, all six turned their heads towards the small windows. A yellow-grey, hardly structured surface appeared before them, and it looked particularly unreal in the evening sun.

"This is how I imagine the Sahara," Bob said, impressed.

"Rightly so," Jupiter intervened. "The Mojave, but also the Sonora in Arizona are Tropic of Cancer deserts, just like the Sahara. For at the height of the tropics, at 23.5 degrees north

and south latitude, a belt of desert has formed around the earth.” He imitated the sluggish speaking manner of their geography teacher and grinned cheekily. “As you all surely know.”

Chelsea got up and came closer to listen.

“The most famous of these deserts is the Sahara,” Jupiter continued with his lecture. “The fact that Los Angeles is very close to the same latitude as Rabat in Morocco, and Tucson is level with Marrakesh indicate that our Mojave is somewhat related to the Sahara.”

“Did you learn that in school?” Jean asked appreciatively.

Jupe raised his shoulders. “Partly. Last autumn, after the great drought in summer, we dealt with the topic of desert and water.”

Bob and Pete nodded, but they could hardly have contributed much more. This was not necessary at all, because Jupiter Jones was on a roll.

“We have a completely idiotic system for handling water. It dates back to the time of the first settlers. Whoever finds water and is the first to use it, owns the water rights. He who does not use it, loses it. That is why saving water is almost a foreign word with us.

“In the Sahara, people count every single drop, and we keep creating new reservoirs and canals and drilling deeper and deeper for groundwater. But scientists say there comes a time when you have to stop.”

“How soon is sometime?” Chelsea asked.

Jupiter shrugged his shoulders again. “It is predicted that in fifty years, the supply system in Southern California and Arizona will collapse completely.”

“Then what?” Chelsea asked. Jupiter could not have wished for a better listener than the red-haired camerawoman.

“Then we bathe in iced tea,” Pete abruptly ended the First Investigator’s performance. It had not escaped his notice that Chelsea was beginning to take an interest in Jupiter. But he didn’t want to leave the field to his friend so easily, even if he didn’t have the slightest idea about the deserts of the Tropic of Cancer.

“To stick to the subject, who’s thirsty?” he asked. “I play once again the waiter, or more precisely, the steward... and serve refreshments to all.”

3. In the Shadow of the Red Rocks

“Over there,” cried Bob, as the pilot did a circle over the small airport. “The Red Rocks!”

Jupe jumped up. He had dozed off, dreaming of sharp cactus thorns and an oleander leaning over him in the operating room. At that instant, he didn’t realize where he was right away. “What red rocks?” he murmured, looking out of the little window with big eyes. Of course, the Red Rocks of Sedona! Like closely built towers of a mysterious, sunken city, they towered into the evening sky.

“Great!” Pete almost pressed his nose flat against the oval window. “That would be for Mr Madigan.” The father of his girlfriend was not only a horse lover, but also a great fan of Wild West movies. The Red Rocks had served as backdrop for countless famous and less famous backdrops.

They started their landing approach, and less than two minutes later, with a few bounces of the Cessna, they landed.

Despite the evening hours, the heat was oppressive at the airport. The terminal building was even smaller than the one in Camarillo. However, there were many more airplanes. “Those should be the private jets of the musicians,” Bob explained to them with an expert expression.

“It will also be a subject of our documentary,” Jean intervened, “but we’ll talk about that tomorrow. Today, just take a look around Sedona.”

They boarded a rickety, dirty green bus that had been waiting for them. It chugged leisurely towards the brightly lit city. In the meantime the sun had set and the landscape was hardly recognizable. They passed a factory site and two petrol stations. The buildings became closer together and the streets increasingly busier. They almost touched a group of carefree teenagers who had found no room on the sidewalk because of the unbelievable number of people on the streets. The driver cursed extensively and drove only at a walking pace.

The centre of the city was buzzing with activities. Almost everywhere, there were posters for the concert. The event was officially known as ‘*FETE DE LA MUSIQUE*’, but the posters were in all sorts of languages, including Chinese and Japanese.

“All hell has broken loose here for four days,” he said to his passengers. “First this hellish spectacle, then tourists all summer. They believe that here they will meet the ghost of John Wayne in person. Or at least get to see Charles Bronson. And then the whole thing goes into hibernation. This is too much even for a balanced person like me.”

Jean and Chelsea looked at each other. Both seemed to like the blunt manner of the driver. “Would you like to repeat that in front of a camera?” the reporter asked and put on a friendly smile. Then she introduced herself.

“Me?” the driver snorted. “I’m gonna be on TV”? He took one hand off the steering wheel and hit his thigh. “Sure, of course. It’s the truth, word of honour.”

He turned into a narrow side street and stopped in front of a small park. “That is the youth hostel,” he pointed to one side, “and there is the Sedona Sun Motel.”

They got out. A cloud of noise seemed to hang over the whole city. It honked and hooted, screamed, sang and squeaked. Pete was speechless, even Bob just gave a fervent “Oh, my goodness!”

Jean made an appointment with the driver for tomorrow morning. "Then you can see how our work is going," she said to the boys as they said goodbye. The NTV team marched over to the motel.

Chelsea turned around once more. "Don't be late for bed."

"Don't worry," cried Pete, waving to her. "We're in great shape!"

The Three Investigators went through the heavy double gate of the youth hostel.

"I think," said Jupiter, "we should write Kelly a card tonight. Otherwise, she's worried about her Pete." Pete decided not to hear the reference to his enthusiasm for Chelsea. But Jupiter did not let up. "The lady is too old for you, my dear, and besides, she's taken." Pete and Bob looked at him in wonder.

"A tip for life," lectured Jupiter. "One look at the ring and finger, you're never wrong."

They laughed, and Bob was about to start thinking aloud whether this poetry was by Shakespeare or just by Jupiter Jones, when a bright male voice laughed behind them. They turned around and saw a friendly, Asian-looking man.

"I'm Rick Che, the manager here, and you must be the boys from Rocky Beach. We have only one twin room with an emergency bed for you, but with a view of the Red Rocks."

The room on the first floor was actually a bit small. When they wanted to stow their duffel bags, it turned out that the cupboard door could only be opened if at least one of them was either in bed or went into the corridor.

The decision was made by lot. Bob had to make do with the emergency bed, Pete moved into the lower bunk bed, and Jupiter went upstairs, as the leader of The Three Investigators was entitled to.

They quickly changed their T-shirts. Jupiter had to clench his teeth to keep from moaning. He avoided looking at his bruised shoulder. Then they set off.

While Jupiter informed Uncle Titus by telephone about their arrival, Bob and Pete were already sniffing the evening air, which was now a little more lurid than when they arrived. It was still incredibly loud in the streets of the city.

Sedona had only 3,500 residents, but for many years it had been a magnet for artists and artisans who preferred to settle here, even if only temporarily.

On the main street and the narrow side streets, countless shops lured visitors, offering silk scarves, silver jewellery, carved art, baskets, hand-woven bags, mouth-blown glass, clay pots or handmade paper. In between there were mainly bars, bistros and self-service restaurants.

After they had inspected the main street up and down, it finally became too much for Jupiter. "Hungry," he moaned as they passed a bar lavishly decorated with palm trees. That wasn't true, because he was just tired and had to think about the possible consequences of his accident all the time, but it sounded extremely convincing in the ears of the others. They had been feeding on Aunt Mathilda's provisions on the plane, and that was three hours ago.

Pete looked at his watch. It was a little after ten. "Just the right time for a little snack," he said enterprisingly with an inviting gesture towards the entrance. 'Mexicana' flaunted in bold pink neon writing above it.

It was crowded inside. At the bar, the guests stood in rows of three, and old swing numbers boomed from the loudspeaker. A baseball match was played on a large screen hanging diagonally over the drinks shelves.

They wriggled their way through the bright, elongated restaurant, where a conspicuous number of green plants stood. At the very back, in an attached winter garden, they found places at a huge round table.

"Kind of nice," Pete said, "Rocky Beach could use something like that."

Jupiter was satisfied and Bob particularly liked it. For months, he had been into the big band sound of the 1930s and 1940s. His fingers snapped to the beat.

A glance at the map showed that the prices were also acceptable. They ordered orange juice and studied in detail the food on offer.

“What is Alfalfa?” Bob asked.

Jupiter, who had already decided on a sandwich with salad, shrugged his left shoulder.

“Surely a capital city in Central Africa,” Pete said, without making a face.

“Nonsense,” cried Bob. “Here’s ‘Chicken, Avocado and Alfalfa Club Sandwich’!”

“Order it and we’ll be smarter,” Jupiter suggested. “Or ask our neighbours. After all, you are in charge of research.”

“Okay,” Bob replied. At the next table sat a couple who had their backs to them. Bob leaned over. “Excuse me, do you happen to know what is Alfalfa?”

The young woman turned around. The Three Investigators looked at the freckled face of a pretty girl with short hair.

“*Hola*,” Pete let it slip. He blushed a little before he could even catch the disapproving looks of Jupiter and Bob.

The girl smiled and said: “You mean Alfalfa sprouts... They are sprouted from Alfalfa seeds—which comes from the Alfalfa plant.”

“Many thanks,” Jupiter was the first to find his voice. “Sorry, we didn’t understand.”

“When Alfalfa seeds germinate for a few days in a humid environment, alfalfa sprouts are formed,” said the girl patiently. “They taste good and are healthy. Any other questions?”

“What’s your name?” Pete stepped in.

“Ruth. Why?”

“So that we can turn to you if we have any further queries.”

“Are you strangers here?”

The Three Investigators nodded and introduced themselves.

“Join us,” Ruth invited them. “We’re not from Sedona either, but we’ve been here for a while.” She nudged her companion, who was now finally ready to turn around as well. “This is my brother Chosmo.” Chosmo proved to be as freckled and short-haired as his sister.

The three detectives ordered their food and changed places. Soon the most important information was exchanged.

Ruth and Chosmo were from the East Coast. Their father was a newspaper publisher in New York and had gotten them a job with the *Sedona Tribune*. They would stay here until the end of the year to decide whether they wanted to study journalism or not.

The Three Investigators told them about the documentary project and that they had only arrived by plane from Los Angeles in the afternoon.

“Do you come here often?” Jupiter leaned forward and had to groan softly. Involuntarily he touched his shoulder, which was burning terribly in the meantime.

“Every night,” replied Chosmo, who looked exactly like his sister. They both had the same snub noses and strikingly large bright eyes. “The prices are reasonable and the food is good... and the music is great.” To reinforce this, Chosmo used soft movements on an invisible drum kit. Bob would come in with his fingers, and Pete would play the trumpet. Jupiter rolled his eyes and winked at Ruth.

After the meal, Bob made friends with the excellent alfalfa sprouts on this day. Jupiter urged them to leave. The five arranged to meet the next day.

“Same time, same station,” Ruth said in high spirits as she left. “And if you have any questions, I’m always available.”

4. Sedona is Being Blackmailed

When they went into the common bathroom of the youth hostel the next morning, The Three Investigators noticed that something was wrong. Nobody was in the shower, instead several groups had formed, in which everybody was chattering more or less loudly and violently.

They approached the nearest person there—a boy with nickel-plated glasses who was holding a newspaper. “Do you know what’s going on in here,” Jupiter asked.

“Have you heard?” the boy replied. “Sedona is being blackmailed.”

Jupiter, Pete and Bob were wide awake all of a sudden. The boy told them about a call to the city council the night before. A man had demanded \$250,000 and the cancellation of the music festival, which will take place in three days. “If they don’t pay, this guy is going to poison the drinking water in the whole city,” the boy said.

“May I?” Jupiter took the newspaper out of the boy’s hand. It was the *Sedona Tribune*. He skimmed over the article, which had a bold headline, but understandably did not contain much information yet.

“We’ll shower, have breakfast and go to the newspaper office,” Jupe suggested, “where we’ll certainly learn more.”

Pete and Bob looked at him in surprise. “There’s not much time before the concert,” continued Jupiter, “so we have to—”

“In exactly twenty minutes, we are supposed to meet the team,” Bob interrupted him and looked at his new waterproof watch, which he had bought with his last salary from Sax Sendler, “You’re not going to make them wait for us, are you?”

Now it was Jupiter’s turn to be surprised. For once, he had forgotten something. However, he thought that here in the bathroom was not the right moment to tell them the reason for it. He had slept badly and had woken up countless times that night when he came to lie on his right shoulder. It was quite swollen in the morning. So he felt anything but good. He just wanted to keep it to himself for now.

“Of course not,” Jupiter said as calmly as possible. “Well, unlike you two, I’m a full-blooded detective. That’s part of being a detective, you gotta get your priorities straight.”

He looked at the two friends as if they had to understand this strange answer. Then he gave the boy back his paper and disappeared into one of the showers. Pete pushed Bob questioning in the ribs. But he just shrugged his shoulders in confusion.

After a long shower, the First Investigator felt better. At least well enough to tease Pete, who carefully shaped his brown fuzzy head with the help of a hair-dryer. “Chelsea would be impressed,” Jupiter said and got a decidedly bored look in return.

At breakfast, blackmail was the only topic being discussed. Mr Che had been listening to the radio all morning and was well informed about the situation.

The blackmailer’s call was received shortly after 10 pm in the city administration’s telephone exchange, which was manned by a night watchman. In the meantime, he had gone on record with the police that the voice sounded like it was from a recording and had not answered any of his questions. The blackmailer wanted the \$250,000 in small bills of non-consecutive numbers.

“For his demand to cancel the concert, he gave a strange reason,” the manager of the youth hostel reported. “It’s far too great a burden on the environment.” The blackmailer had not given any further instructions, such as how the money should be handed over, but threatened that poison would be introduced into the city’s drinking water if his conditions were not met.

“Is that all you know?” Jupiter asked Mr Che between two pieces of jam sandwiches.

“We don’t know what the police know,” he replied. “They have imposed a gag order.”

“And we’d have to crack them,” Jupiter said to the other two after Mr Che had turned to the next table. “It would be a start, anyway.”

“Maybe we can somehow reconcile the two parties,” Pete thought aloud. “How about this? Boys from Rocky Beach save big mess.”

Bob tore the two friends from their thoughts. “I don’t understand you two. We took a job. You can’t leave them hanging like that.”

“Nobody wants to let you or the team down,” Jupiter reassured him. “Sax Sendler would be pleased with us. But we can keep our eyes open at the same time, right?”

Bob nodded and looked at the clock again. “Time to go,” he said enterprisingly. He was looking forward to working on the documentary. He did not want to miss the chance to meet so many well-known musicians—especially not by any blackmailer, whom the local police could be in a much better position than The Three Investigators. Firstly, Bob thought, they had a completely different job and secondly, they had no idea about Sedona.

In front of the gate of the hostel, Mr Carmichael, the driver from yesterday, was waiting with his dirty green bus. Simon and Chelsea already stowed away the video lights and cables.

“Hi,” said the camerawoman when she saw the boys. “Slept well?” She didn’t even wait for the answer. “There’s a lot going on here, did you hear? Some maniac is poisoning the drinking water.” The boys just nodded.

“I hope the police catch that man soon,” Chelsea said, “otherwise we can give the documentary away. Jean is on the phone with the editors to discuss how to proceed. Actually Mr Carmichael should be filmed now at the town sign just outside the city gates. If the recordings are successful, we could start and end the documentary with this scene,” she explained her idea to The Three Investigators.

Jean came out of the motel, and a little later the group left in a good mood. “The headquarters of the news and music station in San Diego did not consider the blackmail to be very important yet,” the journalist said. “So we shall proceed as planned.”

During the ride, Jupiter, Pete and Bob leafed through the script that Jean had given them on the plane. The documentary also dealt with the musicians and groups who had come to Sedona. But the focus was on the significance of the event for the small town—both positive and negative. The number of overnight stays sky-rocketed, the hoteliers and landlords earned more in a few days than their counterparts in other places did in three months. The city had practically no debts. Se dona’s reputation among jazz and rock fans even had a positive effect on the settlement of industrial companies.

“For well-paid professionals from the big city who are thinking of moving to the countryside,” Jean had written in the script, “a lot depends on the leisure value. In a comparison to many places, Sedona is ahead. Thanks to the music festivals, it can offer more than a normal small town of a similar size.”

“Look out the window,” Jean interrupted the boys while they were reading. “You can read my golden words later.”

In front of them, a dense dark green forest area spread out. It had survived the summer heat—until now, at least. “This is the Coconino National Forest,” explained Mr Carmichael, “and there to the north begins Oak Creek Canyon.” But the scenery was dominated by the Red Rock towers, which gave the whole scenery its majestic backdrop.

“Like in those classic Westerns,” enthused Pete. Jupiter rather felt like dealing with something very real. “What’s the drinking water situation in Sedona?” he asked Carmichael.

“In contrast to many other communities in the area, we don’t actually have any problems despite the long heat spells,” the driver replied readily. “Only when it doesn’t rain for an extremely long time do we sometimes have a shortage of water.”

“When was the last time?”

“Our water specialist,” the camerawoman interfered laughing, but Jupiter was undeterred—not even by Bob’s frown.

“Well, the last time was about three or four months ago,” Carmichael recalled. “All the pipes were shut down for two days and we had to get water from large tanks on trucks.” The driver hesitated. “It was kind of weird. Just before that, it rained heavily a couple of times.”

Satisfied Jupiter leaned back on his seat. As always, when he thought, he pinched his lower lip. He believed that the investigators could do both—towing cable reels and investigating. He had the feeling that they hadn’t just flown to Sedona to help Jean and the others with their documentary project. But those were thoughts he was better off keeping to himself—just like this now stubborn throbbing and stabbing pain in his right shoulder.

They had arrived on the Arizona State Route 179—the Red Rock Scenic Byway—which led to Flagstaff and on to the Grand Canyon. At the town sign, Carmichael parked the bus at the roadside.

“Jupiter, will you please take over the notes,” Jean said in a sympathetic, but rather businesslike tone. She pressed a small clipboard into his hand, to which paper was attached with a large clip, and a stopwatch. Simultaneously with the signal ‘camera running’, he should press the clock to write down keywords of the interview and the respective time. This enabled the relevant positions to be found later during the film editing. “All right?” Jean asked.

“If there’s nothing else,” Jupiter replied and wiped the sweat from his brow. That can be fun, he thought, when it’s as hot as a sauna in the morning.

“Pete and Bob, you will help Simon with the unloading. Then he will explain how to use the video lights.” Jean turned to the camerawoman. “Chelsea, if you need one of them for the battery, you let me know.”

While the team got down to work, Jean was looking for a place for the interview. Then she spoke to Mr Carmichael. Jupiter learned that he was born in Flagstaff and had lived in Sedona for thirty years. He was a widower and his business had four other buses in operation.

Jean positioned Carmichael next to the town sign, around which some cacti were grouped by chance. Jupiter stayed at a safe distance.

“Will look great,” Chelsea remarked. “Spikes always work well. Gives the film a critical touch.” They laughed.

“Do we need light?” asked the reporter.

Chelsea blinked into the camera. “Let’s try it, or do you want him in back-light?”

“For goodness’ sake, far too romantic!” Jean cried. “I want to get in with clear pictures. Simon, are you ready?”

The sound man nodded.

“Great, isn’t it?” Pete pushed Jupiter, of all people, on the wrong shoulder, and Jupiter had to clench his teeth again.

“They’re professionals,” Bob whispered again with an expert expression. “I told you so.”

“Quiet now, we’ll begin.” Jean wanted to shoot two versions, one with Mr Carmichael alone and the other with an interview where she was in the picture. She started with the latter.

“Camera running,” Chelsea said, and Jupiter pressed the stopwatch.

The bus driver, who at first replied a bit uptight, quickly defrosted and told what he thought about the spectacle, the musicians, the artists and tourists, just like the evening before in the bus. Jupiter wrote down some keywords. Soon, Carmichael was almost unstoppable. Like a waterfall, he talked about the city administration and the mayor, about the traffic during the summer months and the idea of a bypass road, but it failed because of the environmentalists.

After twenty minutes, it was all over. Chelsea took the tape out of the camera and labelled it ‘Carmichael/01’. Jupiter gave his notes the same marking.

In the meantime, the sun was quite high up. The Red Rocks rose like tongues of fire into the blue sky. Carmichael suggested that the group go to Schnebly Hill. “Up there, you have an amazing view of the city and the surrounding area,” he said.

Jean agreed immediately, but wanted to listen to the radio for a moment for the latest on the blackmailing.

“We are interested too,” Pete said without being asked. This time it was him who got a disapproving look from Bob.

The transmitter hissed briefly and then became clear. “... not yet identified,” said a dark male voice. “Police have confirmed that the *Sedona Tribune* has also received a blackmail letter with the same content. In the meantime, a spokesman for the city administration has announced measures to secure the drinking water supply. However, no details were given. The population was called upon to follow the instructions of the authorities.

“For the time being there are no signs of contamination of the water. Nevertheless, water trucks have been set up in central places in the city to supply the population in case of an emergency. We will inform you about further investigations with live broadcasts in our morning programme.”

While Pete and Bob marvelled at the landscape, Jupe took the clipboard and briefly noted down the few facts they knew about the blackmail so far—a man, a phone call, a letter. He made a big circle around the *Sedona Tribune* and an arrow to two names—Ruth and Chosmo.

5. A Cocky Press Officer

After the short trip to Schnebly Hill, Mr Carmichael brought them to the city hall. Jean had already made an appointment with Mr Welles, the city's press officer, from the media office. He turned out to be an unsympathetic show-off who took himself very seriously and acted as if he had to catch the blackmailer by himself.

"For security reasons," Jean imitated Mr Welles's nasal tone during the drive, "he would have to cancel the interview." But Jean didn't take no for an answer. On the contrary, she repeated some of her strongest arguments which impressed The Three Investigators.

Finally, the press officer had to give in. The city hall was very busy. Police officers in uniform ran back and forth, several camera teams waited in front of a cordoned-off staircase leading up to the mayor's office. Like a peacock, Welles strutted past them into a large office with dark wood panels.

"Richly noble," Pete whispered to the other two. Stealthily they looked around. On the desk were two low piles of files, aligned exactly next to each other, which were more reminiscent of a decoration. The front wall was fitted with a bookshelf. In one corner there was a television with a video player, and in the other, a flip chart.

Jupiter nudged Pete. "There," he said softly, pointing to the large white sheets. Someone had written down keywords about the blackmail case with lines and arrows. '10:11 pm' was at the top in red, '9:36 am' below. Mr Welles seemed to have forgotten these notes. In any case, he made no attempt to turn them over or remove them. That's how busy he was with getting into position on his high-backed desk chair.

"Bob, please stand here with the video light on," Chelsea gave her instructions. Jupiter was to press the stopwatch again.

"What financial importance do music festivals have for Sedona," Jean began the interview.

Mr Welles put his arm on the desk with exaggerated ease, stretched his chin forward and started a long, cumbersome answer.

Such a prick, thought Pete, who had nothing to do but watch. Inconspicuously he peered at the flip chart. and began to memorize all the details of the notes. Also the names 'Walton'. Underneath was a plus sign and '25 men'. Next to a capital 'A' someone had written a question mark.

Slowly Pete looked around the office again. The flip chart. and the files should not be everything. The opportunity presented itself because everybody was busy with Welles. Carefully and quietly, the Second Investigator crept to the door. He felt the door panel on his left elbow, then he gently pushed the handle down. Then he slipped out.

Just as he was writing down a particularly turgid sentence from Mr Welles, Jupiter heard the creaking.

"Because of the appreciation that Sedona enjoys in the international music scene," the press officer said into the microphone, "our small town has become a partner to the world." The caustic dialogue was now exactly 5 minutes and 18 seconds old.

Jupiter then looked up and immediately noticed that Pete was missing. Another thoroughbred detective, it shot through his head.

Now Bob had also noticed Pete's departure. He gave Jupiter a questioning look. Jupiter shrugged his shoulders inconspicuously, but the right shoulder reminded him again emphatically of the cactus. He did not pay attention to the pain, but delved into his notes.

Meanwhile, the press officer praised the advantages of Montezuma Castle, a ruin built directly into the mountain, very nearby. The first settlers had falsely associated them with the Aztecs, which was where the misleading name came from. "Another wonderful tourist attraction in our surroundings," he said.

Jean interrupted him with a specific question about traffic and waste, which obviously did not suit her interviewee at all.

Welles glanced at his watch. "I'll allow one more question," he said, as if he was the White House press secretary. Jean didn't let up. "How many vehicles roll through town on a typical summer's day?"

"By no means a few, you are quite right," he answered in a rather vague manner. He did not know more exact figures, because his office was not responsible for such things. Jean couldn't help but stifle a long-stretched "What a pity..."

"Now I would like to take the opportunity to ask you about the current state of this blackmailing affair," she continued, thus meeting Jupiter's secret wishes.

Mr Welles raised his right eyebrow. "... Without the camera and microphone, please," he demanded theatrically, but then had nothing new to say, except that a second call had come in, this time to the *Sedona Tribune*. Again the voice had sounded as if from a recording. "As a professional, you will understand," he murmured, "that I cannot, of course, give you any further details."

Jean just nodded and declared the interview over. Jupiter stopped his watch. Still with the video light in his hand, Bob came towards him. "Where's Pete?" he hissed.

"Perhaps he got bored," Jupiter quietly replied and grinned at Bob.

In the meantime, Welles had said an awkward goodbye to Simon, Chelsea and Jean. The reporter could hardly suppress her disappointment and was the first to leave the office with great strides.

"Such a show-off! Such a pompous ass," she hissed as Welles closed the door behind her. "Let's get out. I just can't stand guys like that."

Chelsea agreed with her. Jupiter noticed how a knowing smile spread over Simon's sun-tanned face. He obviously did not experience such an outburst for the first time.

"Pete's still missing," Bob said somewhat sheepishly. He was afraid of getting some of Jean's annoyance. But he was wrong.

"We'll just wait outside the door," she said much more politely. "After this theatrical performance, nothing will upset me."

They entered the stairwell through the wide corridor, which was decorated with several portraits of the honorary citizens of Sedona.

Behind them fast steps became louder and louder. Jupiter didn't need to turn around to know who was coming. Pete was already next to him. They winked at each other conspiratorially. Jupiter's gaze fell on the bulge under Pete's dark blue T-shirt before he crossed his arms in front of it.

In front of the city hall, two taxis beckoned to take them to Potter's Playground. In the taxi, Pete pulled out a piece of paper from under his T-shirt and looked around self-satisfied.

"Come on, give me your news," growled Bob.

"Are you sure," Pete replied, "that this doesn't distract you too much from our leading role in the documentary?"

Bob made a grim face and thought it was beneath his dignity to react to something like that at all. But Jupiter and Pete knew that he couldn't stay angry for long and was surely bursting with curiosity himself.

Pete began his report with a scrutinizing look at the driver, who was not at all interested in the young passengers.

6. Who is Adeline Hancock?

Potter's Playground was an old huge hangar that was converted to host concerts. There were also a number of small buildings that now housed recording studios and two rehearsal stages.

After the Second World War, the prototype of a super-small aircraft with an exceptionally long range was built here. But then the government withdrew from the contract and the work was stopped due to lack of funds.

For many years everything had remained as it was until some musicians and sound engineers found a sponsor for the installation of a rehearsal and concert stage together with the appropriate technology. In the meantime not only festivals were held here, but also seminars and courses. Furthermore, records and videos were also produced here.

When the taxis pulled up at the entrance of Potter's Playground, the Second Investigator was finished with his report. He had Jupiter and Bob take a quick look at the plan he had stolen from the city hall and which showed the water supply system of the city. But the driver now peered backwards rather suspiciously, so they postponed their conversation until later.

The boys got out exuberantly. They had made a step forward in the blackmailing case. When Jupiter and Bob were listening to Mr Welles's interview, Pete had paid a visit to the coincidentally empty meeting rooms in the building.

A plan had been left opened on the desk. Pete had taken a quick look and it was some kind of water supply system plan. He had been able to fold the plan and slip it under his T-shirt without being noticed. Just in time, Pete was almost caught by a suddenly appearing employee. He had quickly asked for the toilet, and the helpful employee had shown him the way. However, Pete had the feeling that the man was watching him. And therefore he had actually gone to the toilet.

There, chance had helped Pete again. While he was in one of the toilet stalls re-folding the plan he stole, two men had come into the toilet. Pete recognized from the legs of their pants that they were policemen. The two men then talked openly about the blackmailing situation without realizing that someone was over-hearing their conversation.

According to one of the policemen, the blackmailer had gone into action again and had demanded in writing—on some kind of eco-friendly paper—the handing over of the ransom at 9 am Sunday. As it is, the police took the matter seriously and had advised the city administration to get the quarter million quickly.

"Do you know what I think?" the one policeman asked on the way out. "That it all has to do with Adeline Hancock." Pete had not been able to hear the answer.

"You did a great job," Jupe praised the Second Investigator and looked towards the taxi with Jean and her team, which rolled towards them at a leisurely pace.

Bob also patted his friend on the shoulder appreciatively. But he wasn't really into it. Potter's Playground interested him more than water supply systems.

Jean had arranged a meeting with the manager of Potter's Playground. They were expected at the entrance.

"You must be from NTV," a young man with a Rasta hairstyle and a French accent welcomed Jean. "I'm Hank. I'm here to meet you." He suggested a quick tour. "... If you don't mind," he added.

“On the contrary,” Bob blurted out.

Jean smiled at him. “Let’s go,” she said enterprisingly.

Jupiter was to join Chelsea this time, who dictated keywords for later editing. According to Jean’s script, most of the documentary would be shot here.

The hangar was buzzing with activity. On stage some of the singers had just done their sound check. Technicians ran back and forth, including a group of bassists with their heavy instrument cases. At a dizzying height, a few spotlights were replaced under the hall ceiling. Rehearsals for video recordings took place at the rear of the hangar.

“Now camera three and pan!” cried one long-haired director angrily. “And silence, if you please!”

“I’m sure you know there’ll be a non-stop show here tomorrow,” Hank explained.

“Preparations are in full swing. It takes a huge effort. And now that the blackmail has been revealed, everyone is even more nervous than usual.” Jean nodded and Bob’s eyes widened.

“Did you know about the concert?” Bob whispered sarcastically to Jupiter, whose thoughts were back with the blackmailer and so he waved without much interest.

“If I am correctly informed, tickets have even been reserved for us,” said Jean.

“Super!” Bob shouted and pushed Juve enthusiastically.

Juve moaned so loudly that everyone stared at him. He felt that horrible throb in his shoulder again. Above all, they noticed how he turned turkey red. “Something here was electric,” he heard himself say. Satisfied with his quick wit, he looked around.

The team followed Hank while Bob and Pete examined Jupiter thoroughly. But he just pulled his face as indifferently as possible and with a quick movement of his hand asked them to move on.

After looking at the mixing console, the control room for the hall and one of the small recording studios in the outbuildings, which are padded with thick grey foam, they came to Mr Jaubert, the manager of Potter’s Playground, in his office. He was a small, not quite young gentleman who looked more like the vice president of a private bank.

“I’m glad you’re here,” he greeted Jean. “Before I forget, your editor asked you to call him back. If you’d like...” He pointed at the telephone.

Jean declined with thanks. The first thing she wanted to do was to conduct the interview.

Jaubert was the exact opposite of Mr Welles and The Three Investigators found him immediately likeable. In Paris, he had owned a music company, but then he had emigrated to Arizona and had been living in Sedona for ten years. He knew his way around and willingly gave information, even about the earnings at Potter’s Playground. Three million dollars were earned annually with concerts, courses and some recordings on behalf of large companies. Part of this money went into a foundation, which in turn provided grants for young, talented musicians.

“That has been available for classical music and jazz for a long time,” Jaubert said.

“Rock, pop or soul used to go away empty-handed, but it’s different now.”

After just under a quarter of an hour, or to be more precise—13 minutes and 20 seconds, as Jupiter could tell from his notes, the conversation was over. Chelsea obtained permission to come back the next day to do video recordings at the hall and studios.

It was only when they had already arrived back to the entrance to the grounds that Jean remembered to call her editor. “I’ll call him back at the motel and then get us a decent lunch.” She looked down at her colourful embroidered denim shirt. “And a fresh blouse won’t hurt in this heat either.”

“We’ve forgotten something else,” Bob said. Everyone looked at him.

Jupiter knew immediately what his friend wanted to say. If he came to his aid now, he certainly would have an ace up his sleeve to convince Bob that further investigations into the blackmailer were urgently needed. "Of course, the concert tickets," Jupe cried.

"I'll get it tomorrow," Jean decided.

Wearing a black T-shirt with yellow neon writing, the reporter came back to the small dining room. Only when she threw her writing pad on the table did the others notice that something was wrong.

"They're mad," she said. "They're mad as ever!" Her blond plait was bouncing back and forth. "Chelsea, don't get upset now," she said sarcastically. "All I need is to blow a fuse. In two hours, Alfred Herbert Smith will be here," she stretched the name and wagged her hips to it, "to take over you and Simon, as our excellent boss put it. My documentary is put on hold, because reporting on this petty, rotten blackmail is of priority now."

She struck the table with her flat hand. Chelsea and Simon didn't say anything.

"Maybe this isn't just a petty blackmail," Pete remarked.

"What do you mean?" Jean glared at him.

"We asked around a bit," Jupiter intervened. "More specifically, Pete was asking around while you were doing the interview. If you give us a few hours off, you might get your team back in action very quickly."

Now Chelsea and Simon also looked at the three of them in amazement. Jupiter felt a bit uncomfortable with it, because they really didn't have much in their hands yet. Nevertheless, he thought that it was the right moment to put the cards on the table, more precisely, their business card. He nested the impressive document from his trousers pocket and handed it to Jean with a somewhat unsuccessful bow. The card said:



Jean let the business card slip through her fingers. "What kind of kid's stuff is this?" she asked gruffly. Pete and Bob felt the insult.

Chelsea also took a look at the card. She didn't seem particularly surprised. "Let the boys go," she said soothingly. "At the moment, we can't use them anyway. And maybe..." But doubts were also written all over her face.

"We have already solved many tricky cases," said Jupiter coolly and thoughtfully. If these TV people don't believe us, he thought, then that's their problem, not ours.

"Sure, we don't have much time," Pete said emphatically businesslike. "But we're a well-oiled team. And you..." he looked at Jean offensively. "You should know that you have nothing to lose."

A serving girl in shorts brought six steaks with salad. Everyone was silent.

The reporter calmed down slowly. "You're detectives?" she asked. Nervously she snipped her steak. She is one of those people who likes to take matters into her own hands,

Jupiter noted. She doesn't like surprises that others bring up. "Amateur detectives, or what?" she asked.

"We have an office in Rocky Beach," Pete answered, "with a computer, photo lab and answering machine. We know what we're talking about when we say 'We'll Investigate Anything'."

"I am in favour of you taking care of the blackmail," Simon intervened. "And if you really find out something, maybe we can even get you a special fee from our station." He winked at Jean. "Or by our boss herself. She's been trying to get back at this Smith guy for a long time."

The reporter had almost regained her sense of humour and gave in. "Go forth, you supermen of Sedona," she told The Three Investigators. "Tomorrow afternoon, 2 pm sharp, we meet again. And bring the blackmailer with you—for an exclusive interview, okay?"

7. Time is Running Out

The Three Investigators were sitting in one of the shady and quiet courtyards of the Tlaquepaque Arts & Shopping Village and had spread out the plan from the city hall on the terracotta floor. The plan was almost one metre by one metre when unfolded.

Pete pointed out places on the map that were circled with a yellow highlighter. "These could be the sensitive areas—the water booster pump stations. In other words, those places are where an outsider could introduce poison into the water system."

The plan also showed different water pipe systems. Also marked were the main road, the shopping centre, the hotels, some factories and Potter's Playground.

Wordlessly they looked at the plan. The whole city area was divided into individual districts. "These borders must also have something to do with the water supply," Bob pondered. "Maybe it's about those water rights issues you were talking about yesterday." He looked at Jupiter a little uncertainly.

"Could be," admitted the First Investigator, "we'd have to find out how things are done in Sedona. Now, let's get back to the flip chart. The 'A' could stand for Adeline, can we agree on that? The other two nodded. "There is no Adeline Hancock in the phone book, but there are seven others with that last name."

Jupiter pulled his notes out of his pocket, smoothed the paper and pointed to the names Ruth and Chosmo. "Maybe they can tell us who Adeline is." He pinched his lower lip. "And then I'd love to know what happened three or four months ago when there was no water despite the rain."

"I'm sure they know someone who can explain the water rights situation to us," Pete said and stood up. "We have many questions and very few answers. I am in favour of changing that as soon as possible. The 36 hours we have left are not exactly generous."

"How about we just check the places that were circled in yellow?" Bob suggested.

Thanks to the carelessness of the press officer and Pete's good memory, they knew the two exact times when the blackmailer had contacted City Hall. They also knew that no less than 25 police officers were on duty.

"Presumably they are already in position," Jupiter said. "We'll just play like tourists so we won't stand out so much."

Pete had already started to transfer the yellow circles to the city map that they got from the hostel, along with three bikes that were no longer quite as fresh as they were. Jupiter had been a little uncomfortable with the thought of riding a bike, but there was probably no way out.

"Okay," said the First Investigator. "We'll go to the locations. And then we'll stop by the *Sedona Tribune* office."

"Let's go," Pete took over enterprisingly. He folded the plan and the map together and tucked them under his T-shirt. Then they got on their bikes.

They rode through the main street, which was not quite as busy as the last night. Many shop doors were invitingly open, people sat in the sun in front of bars and bistros.

"How can they stand this heat," Jupe puffed, longing back to the Pacific coast.

When the rows of houses became less dense, Pete stopped and pulled out the city map. "We'll continue north here until we reach Oak Creek." He pointed to one yellow circle.

Slowly they rode their bikes further. Again and again they were overtaken by cars and campers. "I'm already very tired," Bob said, panting. He stopped and stretched. In doing so, he kept a close eye on the surroundings.

On the right side of the road was an abandoned petrol station. About fifty metres away from it, a small building protruded from the meadow. It was half built into a hill. This had to be the first booster pump station.

Two young men were lounging opposite the building in the shade of a maple tree while listening to music. Both wore jeans, one was blond, the other dark-haired. A motorcycle was parked nearby. "If they're from the police," Bob whispered, "I've seen more imaginative cover-ups."

They had arrived at the level of the entrance to the building. The stone house had a metal door the size of a window. Three padlocks shone in the sun.

"How far do we want to go?" Pete asked when they were within earshot of the men.

"We've only just started our tour," Jupiter said.

"We'll have to look around a bit more in the area. You don't come to Sedona that often." Bob winked at Jupiter. But Jupiter did not react, but looked past him to the maple tree.

"Well, if they really were policemen," he said, "then, depending on how bright they are, they'll be suspicious of us by the third point at the latest."

"You're right," Bob interjected, "they're probably onto us by then."

"And there's probably a manhunt out for us," Pete said. When he got a few unpleasant looks, he made a grimace. "All right, then. They should think that we are boys on a cycling trip out here. Meanwhile, I say we just keep going."

Jupe gave in reluctantly. The three continued cycling. After half a kilometre they turned off the main road and headed straight for Red Rocks. At a shady resting place with a drinking fountain, Jupe stopped abruptly. He was not feeling very well.

"Is something wrong?" Pete asked with a frown.

Jupiter held his head under the cold water. Then he let himself fall on the wooden bench. "I have something to say," he moaned. His T-shirt was soaked with sweat. Bob and Pete looked at him in surprise, and sat down at the wooden table.

"So," he started slowly and took a deep breath. In the same moment, he felt much better again. The cold shower had been just the thing, so he decided to postpone telling them his encounter with the cactus to a later time.

"Let's compare the plans again," Jupiter suggested. "Maybe we can review our selections and determine the places we need to go to." Pete nodded and pulled out the two pieces of papers.

They checked and compared the plan from the city hall with the city map again. The city map was not a very good copy, but they managed to confirm that Pete had earlier marked out the highlighted areas correctly.

"Okay," Pete said. "We came from this direction and then turned here." He followed the course with his finger. "So, we are currently here now."

On the map, it could be seen that near to them, there are three more entrances to the water system—one on the edge of a small industrial area, one in the fields, and one more in a built-up area.

Bob paused. "Couldn't this built-up area be Potter's Playground?" He pointed to the map.

"You're right." Pete patted him on the back. "Your orientation is very good."

"I'm for the industrial area," Jupiter decided. "Water, poison and industry—they could somehow fit together. And then we just ride in a loop here past the fields back to the city. This one.." He pointed to the yellow circle marked in the built-up area. "Let's leave it out for now."

After a cool sip from the water fountain, they got back on their bikes and pedalled along a barely-used road into the industrial area.

They passed some buildings that were decorated by well-known names from the computer industry, two auto repair shops, a publishing house and a manufacturer of wind turbines. The heat was stifling. Jupe had the feeling that with every pedal he made, a new outbreak of sweat flooded his body.

Pete was the first to discover the booster pump station. It was very similar to the one on the main road and also had three brand new locks. Not a soul could be seen, but there were more than enough places to hide.

"It's a barren place!" cried Pete. He let go of the handle bar and theatrically clasped his hands over his head. "There's nothing here!" He made a snide gesture in the direction of his two friends, turned his bike around and cycled away. Jupiter and Bob followed him.

"You're on a roll," shouted the First Investigator. "Maybe there's a lead role in the next western for you. Ask your flame Chelsea."

Pete ignored that remark. "A really good detective, says Sherlock Holmes," he lectured in a deep voice, "must also be a good actor." All three laughed. "Mr Holmes suggests we proceed to point three." Pete went off.

Jupiter envied him. Pete Crenshaw, the well-trained athlete, seemed to thaw out properly in the heat. Only after a good two kilometres in a long shady maple alley did the other two catch up with him. Jupiter wheezed like a locomotive.

"According to the map the third point had to be here somewhere," Pete said. They looked around stealthily. At the end of the avenue was a large cotton field.

"Look!" cried Bob in surprise. There was a clear view of an industrial complex. "But it's not on our map."

"Doesn't have to mean anything, maybe it's new," replied Jupiter as they slowly approached the buildings.

At first glance, the complex looked deserted. There was no sound outside, and there were no cars at the car park. "Perhaps it's a movie set," Pete surmised.

"No, I don't think so." Bob shook his head. "A movie set looks different."

They had arrived at the entrance. A heavy rolling gate was lowered. Not a booster pump station in sight.

"Let's take a closer look," announced Jupiter. He locked his bike and hid it behind some bushes.

"What if someone sees us?" Bob wanted to know.

"Then he would have seen us already," Pete replied. "If we really want to achieve something in the short time left until noon tomorrow, we have to take risks."

Jupe felt impatience rising in him. Results were needed. He was also irritated by the pain on his shoulder.

"You're usually always for thinking things through," moaned Bob as he too locked his bike.

"We don't want to break in, we just want to go around the grounds," Jupe said. "Nobody will eat us here. We'll just say we're researching for Jean's documentary."

Bob gave in without really being convinced. He had actually imagined the trip to Sedona to be somewhat different. But for the concert tomorrow evening, which he firmly intended to

attend, not even the blackmailer could stop him.

8. Attack in the Cotton Field?

The area was fenced in with a good three-metre-high wire mesh. Enclosed within it were several inter-connected buildings, which were clad with shiny metal panels. The whole thing was reminiscent of an oversized spaceship.

The First Investigator pointed to the fence. There was a signboard that said that it was an electric fence. Without waiting for an answer, he went on and stared spellbound at the ground. Bob and Pete followed him without a word.

Jupiter was sure to discover something, but at the same time he wanted to get the action over with as quickly as possible. From the road, the complex had looked less hostile. Now, at the edge of these impenetrable cotton fields and right next to this possibly dangerous electric fence, he didn't feel very well.

Pete looked around. Where, he thought, was the booster pump station? Within the fence, there were several large blocked access roads to the cotton fields. The buildings connected by covered passageways had neither windows nor did they carry any signboards or company names.

"It's like a secret laboratory at Cape Kennedy," growled Bob.

"Unlikely," Pete argued. "Secret laboratories are usually hidden and not visible from public roads."

They had arrived at the rear and were now in the shadow of an elongated wing of the building. Here it was at least a little cooler. The cotton fields reached far into the country. Water connections for irrigation rose from the ground like antennae. Behind them the Red Rocks shone.

"Probably this is an agricultural enterprise," Jupe said emphatically.

"What are we doing here?" Pete wanted to know.

"I don't know yet. What I know is that something is not right here." The other two cast meaningful glances at each other. There was no company logo on the back either, no advertising, no signs, nothing.

"Maybe it's all empty because the company went bankrupt," said Pete.

"If that were to be the case, then it would probably have some signs such as 'For Rent' or 'For Sale' somewhere," Bob argued.

"Look at this!" Jupiter had bent down and let earth trickle through his fingers. Now Pete and Bob also noticed that they were standing on a strip of dark earth that came over from one of the buildings and continued into the cotton field as a metre-wide strip of ground.

"This strip of ground was dug up not too long ago," Bob noted. "Probably done by service people who have installed a cable or pipe underneath."

Pete got up and looked around. They were a good 300 metres from the road. He couldn't shake the feeling that they weren't alone out here. He took a few steps forward and then back again to see the angles between the buildings.

"Over there." Pete felt his palms getting damp. "There's a red truck and a black Harley parked in one of the covered passages... Let's go back and check it out."

Jupiter suddenly felt miserable. He tried to blame it on the heat. He got up with a soft groan. The sweat was pouring down on him, his head was spinning, his shoulder was

throbbing and stinging, and the birds' twittering seemed too loud. But he still didn't want his friends to know of his aching shoulder.

"Turn back now?" He packed a soil sample in one of Aunt Mathilda's old family handkerchiefs. "The vehicles have probably been lying around unused for a few years now," he said lightly.

"I don't think so," Pete disagreed.

Bob jumped on the First Investigator. "Now that we're here, let's finish our tour and then get back to the city as soon as possible."

With rapid steps, he took the lead. At the other end of the building, they stepped out of the cooling shadow. The glaring sunlight on the high metal walls hurt the eyes. They turned towards the road. Far and wide there was nothing to see. They were staring into space.

"There," cried Bob, pointing to the wall at one of the smaller buildings. "There is something there."

In the bright sunshine, dirty contours could be seen, which usually remain when letters are removed. Far behind it, the truck and the motorcycle could be seen. Jupiter squinted his eyes together. He was staggering slightly. The first letter was hardly recognizable, the second could be an A, and then clearly followed by the letters L and T and O.

"A-L-T-O? Perhaps it's Walton?" Jupiter pointed out.

"Walton! That was what was written on the flip chart. at City Hall." Pete exclaimed. "It has to be it!"

"At least we have something to work on now," Jupiter remarked.

"Hopefully only we know," Bob said dryly and continued on towards the road.

"Hang on," Jupiter stopped him. "Maybe we'd better split up. If someone is really watching us, he'd need at least two helpers to get all three of us."

"Right. A great idea!" Bob approached again and wanted to pat Juve on the shoulder. At the last moment Juve swerved.

"Then, we'd better hurry up," the Second Investigator interjected. "I want to get out of here fast."

"You," Jupiter first tapped Bob and then Pete, "run to the road by the shortest route. I'm going back the way we came."

"Alone?" Bob asked and raised an eyebrow.

"It's just the three of us, and I got us into this whole thing." Jupiter turned around and walked away. The separation was just a precautionary measure. A real danger, he thought, probably didn't even exist. They have been in more dangerous situations before, but never in such scorching heat. Like a ball of fire, the sun was in the sky. If only there was wind!

Jupiter stared at the terrain. Nothing moved. No door opened, nobody ran to the car, no dog barking. Hopefully, it went through his head, no one will set any guard dogs on them. He had always had powerful respect for such watchdogs. He looked back the way he came. There was no sign of Bob and Pete.

He walked back along the sandy path. On the left was the cotton field, on the right the fence. Sometimes it crunched under his feet. Jupiter wiped the sweat from his forehead, the next moment it was wet again.

The end of the shadow cast by the building at the back was approaching. Ten more steps, nine, eight, seven, six... Unwillingly Jupiter ducked and crept up. Carefully he peered around the corner. He suddenly felt a pain on his head. Then everything went black.

In the distance the birds were chirping. Jupiter heard restrained steps. At first, he thought they were moving away, then he noticed that they were getting closer. Startled, he opened his eyes. He looked into a face close above him.

"What happened?" he heard Bob ask excitedly. Humming in the head, throbbing on the shoulders, Jupiter couldn't sort his thoughts. Slowly he sat up.

"Did somebody hit you?" Bob asked.

"I don't know," muttered Jupiter.

"Did you see anyone?"

The First Investigator shook his head and got up. His eyes fell on the electric fence and he remembered that they had walked along a company's premises. "Walton," he growled. "Where's Pete?"

"At the front by the road," Bob replied. "I came to look for you. We've been waiting for you for over ten minutes." Gradually it became brighter again in Jupiter's head.

"Up," he said more forcefully as he felt, and trotted along.

"Pete, we're here!" cried Bob as loud as he could when they got to the road. Nothing moved. "Pete, where are you?" he repeated.

Breathing heavily, Jupiter plunged behind some bushes. There was no trace of Pete anywhere. Bob ran excitedly back and forth and then built himself up in front of the First Investigator. "He has disappeared."

"Hmm. And his bike?"

"It is there," Bob replied, throwing his friend a nasty look. "If anything has happened to him... then it's my fault. Clearly."

Jupe got up. The company's premises lay between the fields as if nothing had happened. There was one consolation. They now knew that this company, which was laying there so innocently in the sunlight, had something to do with the blackmail case.

Bob sparkled at him. "The whole thing is really ridiculous. First you get hit on the head, and now Pete's gone."

Jupiter thought it was wiser not to answer. Carefully he felt his head for a bump.

"This can't be happening." It suddenly dawned on Bob why Pete had disappeared. "He didn't want to get into long discussions with us."

Jupiter nodded tiredly. They crouched on the side of the road again. At some point Pete had to return from his exploration trip to the eerie terrain.

"Maybe we should go after him now," Bob thought. But then he shook his head. "It's got something strange about it that one of us is missing."

A camper van drove past and Jupiter suggested waiting another quarter of an hour and then discussing how to proceed. Bob agreed and they sank into brooding silence.

But soon Jupiter stood up again, groaning. Idleness tore at his nerves. Bob did not respond.

"Are you still angry?" asked the First Investigator after some time.

"Nah," said Bob, "but you've been kind of tiring the last couple of days." He looked at Jupiter. They were silent again and stared over at Mr Walton's company building.

"You're right," said Jupiter. "Won't happen again so soon."

Again a car drove by and shortly after, another one. The clock hand moved to half past four.

"Pretty hot in the sun." Jupiter walked up and down the street. Dissatisfied, he scratched his head, which was still going on as if a swarm of wasps had settled down there. But strangely enough, he felt much better than before his knock-out blow earlier.

Jupe reconsidered their situation. Maybe Pete was in trouble after all. And he, Jupiter, had made a big mistake with this whole operation. He decided to make amends for them on the spot. "Okay," he decided, "we'll look for him."

"Not necessary!" Bob shouted in high spirits. "Look who's coming!"

Pete easily trotted across the road. "Get this!" The Second Investigator beamed all over his face and pulled a photo out of his pocket. He pointed to the photo. "Here's our Mr Walton," Pete said.

The picture showed a massive man with a Stetson hat, surrounded by people in blue overalls. The text below the photo made it clear that it had been taken at a company party to honour long-serving employees.

"Four months ago he had to close down his business," Pete added. "But in there, everything looks like production could resume at any time."

"And what does it do?" Bob asked.

"Some kind of hyper-modern industrial fleece and filters. Don't ask me what for."

Jupiter suggested to Pete that on the way back to the city he should report everything in order. They cycled slowly through the maple alley, and the Second Investigator reported proudly about the locks he had picked with his lock picks and about his foray through Mr Walton's realm.

"We must find out why production stopped," Pete insisted. He talked about the posters in the halls that had announced the date of the plant closure. They had not provided any reasons for this.

"But what was wrong with his business?" cried Bob. "And where are the employees now?"

They had reached the edge of town and decided to ride to the *Sedona Tribune* office immediately. Pete, still in high spirits, rode ahead. With dreamlike certainty, he moved through the maze of streets as if he knew Sedona like the back of his hand.

Perhaps he has a photographic memory lately, Jupiter thought, and carries the city map completely in his head. "Just like me with a wasp nest," he murmured and tried to keep up with Pete, which was not so easy considering the crowd of people that was already rolling through the streets again.

They passed the restaurant where they had met Ruth and Chosmo the night before. And in the next side street was the newspaper office.

9. A Journalist has Disappeared

The newspaper office was very different from the office where Bob's father worked at the *Los Angeles Times*. No skyscraper, no mirror windows, no glass elevator and no foyer with leather couch. With the *Sedona Tribune* it was easier and probably also a bit more comfortable. With his father, Bob always had to wait at the reception for an okay whether he was allowed to enter the building at all. Here in Sedona, they simply asked for Ruth and Chosmo, and a friendly older lady pointed to them the way.

"How's your head now?" Pete asked sympathetically. Jupe just waved him off. They walked through narrow corridors, the plastering of which was in need of renewal in many places. It smelled like floor wax and canteen food.

The two interns could be found behind the fourth door in the second corridor on the right. Only Ruth was there. She sat at her desk and hammered on the keyboard of her computer.

"Hi!" Ruth looked up and greeted them. "What are you doing here?"

"Visit you, as promised," Jupiter said.

"Find a seat." Ruth pointed to two somewhat wobbly chairs and a stool. "This place is really small, and we are really short-handed here. Chosmo's out but is coming back soon."

She pointed to the First Investigator. "You're Jupiter, right? You've really impressed me."

Jupiter looked down cautiously at himself and wondered whether he had to take this as an insinuation. He looked unmistakably different from Pete and Bob, even though he fortunately had little in common with 'Baby Fatso'—his unloved nickname from the past.

"And you're Bob?" Ruth asked the Second Investigator.

"No, I'm Pete," he said gleefully.

"Okay." Ruth snapped her fingers. "Now I've got it together again."

The Three Investigators looked around the small office. Through the left of the two narrow windows was the bell tower, one of Sedona's landmarks. Ruth's antiquated computer somehow fitted seamlessly with the worn furniture. Two volumes of old editions of the *Sedona Tribune* lay on a white desk. The best thing in this room, Jupiter found, was the pleasant coolness.

"So what do you want?" asked the girl again in her typical New York tone of voice. "Just to see the inside of a newsroom?"

"Not really," Bob interfered, somewhat offended that he had been mistaken for Pete so easily. "My father works for the *Los Angeles Times*. I've been to their newsrooms. There's no shortage of editors from the inside." He enjoyed Ruth's baffled face.

"We need your help," Jupe took the initiative. They had agreed that they wanted to acquaint the two interns with everything they knew, with the exception of Pete's trip to the inside of the Walton grounds. "It's about the blackmail case."

Ruth propped her chin in her left hand and listened attentively as Jupiter told her about the visit to Mr Welles, the water supply system plan and their tour outside the city. She took notes a couple of times. When the First Investigator had finished, she looked at the three boys mischievously.

Then she asked: "How do you actually come to take care of the blackmail case? Weren't you in on some filming for a documentary or something?"

Pete nodded. "Yes, but they've been put on hold." He made a somewhat awkward gesture to the other two. "Besides we have been quite successful detectives for years."

"I see," replied Ruth. Apparently, unlike Jean, she saw no reason for doubt. "Fine, you want my help. You got it. But, I just don't like that word." Confidently, she looked around. "I want to work with you."

"What does that mean?" Bob asked with a frown and he thought of Jean and Chelsea, who had also expressed interest in their work.

"If you really solve the case, I want to write a story about you," Ruth said without much thought. "A story in which you tell about yourself and your work, not just about the blackmail in Sedona. It will be for our youth section, which comes out once a week."

Jupiter looked at Pete and then at Bob. They both nodded. "No problems," the Second Investigator said and saw himself already in the right pose on a newspaper photo. Bob also felt flattered.

"First the work, then the award ceremony," Jupiter brought her back to reality. "We're a long way from success. Do you know if there's anything new?"

"No. The police are silent as the grave. Chosmo was at City Hall, but they won't say anything there either. Obviously groping in the dark, even though the wonderful Welles, whom you have already met, pompously struts around." She looked at the three of them defiantly. "What next?"

"Does the name Adeline Hancock mean anything to you?" Pete asked. Apparently, it was a direct hit. Ruth raised her eyebrows in surprise and appreciation. Her big eyes became even bigger.

"Adeline is a journalist... Was a journalist, you might say." Ruth pause. "She has disappeared."

"Oh?" said Jupiter.

Adeline Hancock had been working for the *Sedona Tribune* until almost a year ago. Ruth had learned about this by chance in the archives a few weeks ago when she stumbled across a report by the young woman. However, nobody in the newspaper office wanted to answer further questions about Adeline.

"What was that report about?" Jupiter asked.

"About Potter's Playground, that is..."

"We know," Bob interrupted her. Jupiter smiled to himself. Music stars or not, now their research expert had caught fire too. And then he didn't want to be held up by already known details.

"They used to have problems," Ruth began.

"With water?" Jupiter interrupted.

Ruth shook her head. Apparently, she didn't know whether to have fun or get angry. "You have a somewhat tiresome way of making conversation. How about I do the talking and you do the listening?"

Without further interruption, Ruth reported that Adeline had started a series entitled 'The City We Live In'. What was originally planned to be a weekend read, became somewhat explosive after the third and fourth instalments. The report about Potter's Playground contained hints about unsolved hazardous waste problems. The next article dealt with shooting a new western, which was to take place in the nature reserve.

"This is actually not allowed," Ruth explained. "And then suddenly the series ended. No one here wants to say why or how. Or nobody knows. Anyway, it was pretty weird."

Supposedly Adeline then got a better job on the east coast. My father asked around for us, but strangely enough, nobody there at the major newspapers have heard of her.”

Jupe wanted to know where she had learned all this from, and Ruth said that she heard about that from an archivist who worked part-time at the *Sedona Tribune*. “Since then everything went into the computer six months ago.” Ruth patted her computer.

“For reasons of cost, however, the old reports and articles are still in folders, just like before. Mr Rosenblatt showed me the whole series. But when I wanted to know more, he too suddenly became very monosyllabic.”

“Did Adeline have family in Sedona?”

“I don’t know.” The girl brushed her short hair. “If you think Adeline Hancock is involved in the blackmail story, then let’s go to the archives.” She looked at the watch. “Mr Rosenblatt is probably there right now.”

They walked back through some winding corridors, up one floor, and stood in front of a door with the ‘Archives’ label peeling off. Ruth knocked and went in. A small, roundish man with gold-rimmed glasses stood between tall filing cabinets. She approached him calmly.

“Good evening, Mr Rosenblatt,” Ruth greeted the archivist. “How are you?”

“Been worse,” said the man in a pleasant, full-sounding voice. “What can I do for you?”

“This is Jupiter...” she faltered.

“... Hancock,” Jupiter came to her aid. Rosenblatt’s face seemed to darken a little. “I’m a cousin of Adeline Hancock and I happen to be passing through with my friends. Actually we wanted to go from Montezuma Castle to Flagstaff right away.” Jupiter then said that he had phoned his mother in Denver to say that his friends and he were well, and it was then when she told him about her relatives in Sedona. “... And that’s why we’re here today.”

Rosenblatt’s face brightened again. “Well, unfortunately I can’t tell you anything about Adeline,” said the elderly gentleman in a friendly manner. “She hasn’t worked for us for some time and has moved away from Sedona. But two of her brothers still live here. Cousins of yours, huh?”

Jupiter decided to pursue further. “Ah, you mean Timothy.”

The archivist startled. “He must be the younger one. I only know René.”

“Do you perhaps know where he lives?” asked a wide-eyed Ruth, who had followed Jupiter’s performance.

“Yes, in the west of the city, I think it’s right by the Multi-Purpose Hall.” They thanked Mr Rosenblatt politely and said goodbye.

In Ruth’s office, they looked in the phone book and made a quick decision. They arranged to meet at the Mexicana two hours later. Ruth wanted to notify Chosmo and promised to find more about the Walton company and the owners of the water rights in Sedona.

“You guys are really going at it,” she said to The Three Investigators just before they left the office.

“Sure,” grinned Pete, “we want to be featured in your paper.”

10. Jupiter Behaves Strangely

In the western part of Sedona, the streets were named alphabetically. Several apartment buildings of prefabricated construction stood on M Street. It probably wasn't the best place to live in Sedona, but at least the area didn't look run-down, especially thanks to the old maple trees that survived all the road works unscathed.

The Three Investigators found the given address immediately. At the bottom, last in the left-hand row, the name 'Hancock' was emblazoned on the bell board. Jupe rang the bell.

Silence.

"Gone," Bob said, looking up at the front of the building. Nothing moved, no window was opened, nobody stepped out on any of the small balconies.

Jupe rang again. Again, no reaction. "Maybe we'll get lucky with the neighbours," he said and pressed the bell of a Mr Christopher. Again, nothing happened.

"This building is pretty much extinct," said Pete impatiently. "It's supposed to be dinner time."

"All good things come in threes," Jupiter quoted Uncle Titus and rang Bernstein's bell.

Shortly afterwards the loudspeaker cracked. "Hello," they heard a woman's voice ask. "Who is that?"

"We're relatives of René Hancock," the First Investigator stuck to his story.

"Unfortunately he's not at home, maybe you can help us?"

There was a pause, and the voice said: "I'll go to the balcony." The speaker cracked.

The boys took a few steps back from the front door and looked up. On the second floor, one of the glass doors to the balcony opened and appeared an elderly woman with white hair which was done up in a knot at the nape of her neck. She looked down at the boys with a certain suspicion.

"I don't know where Mr Hancock is." She examined the three carefully. "But you might try his siblings."

"Can you kindly tell us who are his—" Jupiter pushed Pete in the side and he understood immediately.

"Uh... Where do they live?" Jupiter asked instead.

"A brother, I think, lives just two streets away, over on K Street," said the woman courteously. "I'm sorry, I don't know the house number."

"And the sister?" Jupiter sought to seize the moment.

"Somewhere in the old town," the woman replied readily, "but you might want to check with the *Sedona Tribune*, because that's where she works."

"Friendly, but not up to date," mumbled Bob, without this remark reaching up to the balcony. Mrs Bernstein waved to the boys and disappeared behind the balcony door.

"Sorry. I almost messed up there," Pete said and put his hand on Jupiter's right shoulder.

"Nooo," the First Investigator yelped and bent over the handle bar of his bicycle. Bob and Pete looked at him startled.

Jupiter took a deep breath and massaged the shoulder. "Something stung me earlier." For a moment the pain made him confused. Slowly he straightened up again. "Next time, as a relative, be careful asking questions about relatives."

Without waiting for an answer, he rode his bike away through two narrow rows of trees towards K Street. Bob and Pete followed behind at some distance away.

"Do you know what's going on?" Bob whispered to Pete. "There's something weird about him ever since we got here."

"Maybe something really did sting him. And what was that about the blow on the head?" Bob recalled that he had gone back to the place where they had split up. "Because I did not see him, when I turned the corner, I almost tripped over him. And far and wide there was nobody else there. Pretty strange, huh?"

"Maybe he just had a bad dream," Pete suggested. "That always upsets him a bit."

Pete's attempts at explanation could not convince Bob. He shook his head and decided to look for the other Hancock instead of finding out the real reasons for Jupe's strange mood.

Finally both caught up with Jupe when they crossed L Street. The houses got shabbier. They passed a bar and a Vietnamese greengrocer. Between two trees a phone booth appeared. The Three Investigators stopped in front of the phone booth and waited for Pete to check the address of the other Hancock.

"We can't very well tell this Mr Hancock the story about us being relatives from Denver," Bob asked Jupiter.

"We're not," Jupe replied. "With this one, we're just gonna tell the truth."

Pete came back. He had found the address he was looking for in the phone book. Adeline's brother was named Marcel and lived about four blocks away. It didn't take them five minutes to find number 89. The house had two floors and stood in a small, overgrown garden.

Again Jupiter rang the bell with the name 'Hancock'. This time they did not have to wait long. A Mexican girl with shoulder-length black hair opened the glass door a bit and peered out.

"Hi," she said and looked at the three of them thoroughly.

"Hi," Pete said. "We're looking for Marcel Hancock. Does he live here?"

The girl nodded. Jupiter noticed that when the name was mentioned, she involuntarily swung the front door narrowing the opening. "What do you want with him?" She didn't sound very friendly.

Jupiter leaned his bicycle against the wall of the house. "May we come in?" he wanted to know and he walked towards the door. The opening became even narrower. The girl looked really scared now.

"We've come from Los Angeles and belong to a documentary team that works at the music festival," Pete tried to arouse the young lady's interest. "Can't we come in after all?"

"No," the girl replied loudly. "No can do. Marcel is not home." With that, the door slammed shut.

Astonished, The Three Investigators stood in front of the house. Pete raised his hand to press the bell button once more.

Suddenly behind them a motorcycle pulled up and was parked with the typical gurgling noise. The three turned round and saw, less than twenty metres away from them, a slim man on a black motorcycle. His face was hidden behind a red helmet. The man saw them and almost immediately turned his vehicle around and shot off in the direction of the main road.

Disappointed, they put their arms on their hips. Jupe looked exceedingly pleased. He was willing to bet that that Harley was parked at the Walton premises a few hours earlier.

11. The Blackmailer's Letter

Two things became clear to The Three Investigators as they sat at the Mexicana and waited for the waitress—firstly, they hadn't eaten anything since lunch at the motel with Jean and the others and as a result they had huge holes in their stomachs; and secondly, as far as the blackmailers were concerned, they do not have the latest news.

The hunger problem was quickly solved. Bob and Pete ordered a huge portion of tacos, Jupiter decided on a ham omelette. Then they went to the bar to watch the local TV station's news programme on the giant screen.

It was at least as loud and crowded in the restaurant as the evening before. But when the eight o'clock news came on, the noise level suddenly ebbed away. "Shhh," the guests hissed and their necks stretched.

A newsreader shared the already known facts. The blackmailer had contacted the authorities three times so far, always following the same pattern. Neither the letter nor the location of the calls could be traced so far. This was followed by a live report from the city hall, which a young man began with the sentence "There are still no leads." When Mr Welles was also interviewed, the three returned to their table.

"Either they really don't know much more..." said Jupiter as he sat down on a chair. "... Or they keep what they know to themselves."

"My money's on the latter," Pete said.

A waitress brought orange juice and crackers, which Bob and Pete jumped at immediately.

Jupe massaged his shoulder. The other two watched him furtively.

"If the blackmailer..." Jupe began.

"Before we deal with the blackmailer," Pete interrupted him, "we want to know from you what's going on with your shoulder. No excuses."

Bob nodded sharply. "You're hiding something," he said with a slight accusation in his voice. "Come out with it now."

The First Investigator slid back and forth embarrassed on his seat. He felt that he was blushing, as Pete and Bob looked at him so expectantly and sternly.

"Hi!" A familiar voice suddenly came up behind them. And already Chosmo knocked with his knuckles on the table as a greeting. Jupiter was relieved. He was spared from telling his friends about his unpleasant encounter with some well-fortified cacti.

"I'm okay," Jupiter said as he moved his chair a bit to make room for the Chosmo. Bob and Pete pulled a face in disbelief, but refrained from asking further questions for the time being.

Ruth came along, put a thick folder on the table and said: "As ordered." She then sat down with them.

In short sentences she reported that she and Chosmo had copied Adeline's series and a few of her other reports behind Mr Rosenblatt's back. And she was able to find out a lot about Hendrik Walton, a big industrialist from Flagstaff, who supported the music festival as a patron. Four years ago, he built one of the most modern factories in Arizona on the outskirts of Sedona.

“Cotton is processed into ultra-modern industrial filters,” Ruth continued. “They are for thermal power stations, waste incinerators, and so on. But there are also rumours that Walton is out there working on a new kind of paper.”

“What sort of paper is that?” Pete wanted to know.

“We checked casually with the head of our economics department,” Chosmo replied. “He told us that Walton Industries has been experimenting with a revolutionary type of paper for a long time. Here in Sedona, however, research work is not permitted, because that would involve even more water consumption than is already necessary for production purposes.”

“Well, the blackmail letter that was received by the *Tribune* was written on some sort of eco-paper,” Ruth added.

“Good. And what do you know about the water rights?” Bob asked.

Ruth took a deep breath for the next subject. Water to Sedona was supplied by Oak Creek, some other springs and some groundwater. Everything that came out of Oak Creek Valley belonged to the city. The other sources were in private hands.

“I’ve got something else for you,” Ruth said and looked at the boys defiantly. With pointed fingers she reached into the inside pocket of her leather jacket and pulled out a piece of paper and said: “How much would you pay for this?”

Pete looked over Jupiter’s shoulder and guessed the fastest. “Not bad,” he said appreciatively. “A copy of the letter from the blackmailer, isn’t it?”

“In numbers,” Ruth countered. They did not respond.

“Well, I’m waiting.” Happily she waved the copy of the blackmail letter back and forth in front of their eyes.

“We won’t pay anything,” Jupiter said a bit too harshly. The cheeky girl was not quite his cup of tea. Actually, he found her quite nice, but she was quite exhausting to deal with and was a bit too businesslike.

“Excuse me, Miss. Our friend has his grumpy day today,” Pete tried to defuse the situation and promised five litres of iced tea. At the same time he gave Jupe a look that was supposed to say ‘You can learn a lot from me’.

“Okay, you’ve talked me into it.” Ruth thanked the Second Investigator in an exaggerated way and, much to Jupiter’s displeasure, gave the letter to Pete. Apparently she had not yet fully noticed that The Three Investigators had a leader, and that was Jupiter Jones.

Pete looked at the paper in detail from all sides and then began to read out:

Ladies and Gentlemen,

If you want the fête de la musique to take place as planned, you’ll have to pay \$250,000. This matter is serious. If you don’t follow my instructions, the drinking water in Sedona will be poisoned.

“Well, well,” hummed Jupiter. He didn’t seem too impressed with Ruth’s present—at least he pretended to. “Why doesn’t Walton produce anything anymore?” he asked.

How quickly could Jupiter get jealous, Pete thought.

“An environmental violation about three or four months ago,” Chosmo said succinctly. “In the meantime the building has been rebuilt. Production resumes next week.”

The waitress brought the tacos and omelette. They began to eat in silence.

In the middle of all this, Jupe couldn’t hold on to himself and fished for the blackmail letter. “No date, no signature,” he said. It sounded like a rebuke, and the others, who had long since figured out what was going on, sneered.

Chosmo went on the attack. "You don't have a sister, huh?"

Jupiter blushed. "Thank goodness no. Why?"

"You won't get anywhere like that," Chosmo advised him. "Better make peace, I speak from experience."

"I have no idea what you're talking about." Jupiter put on his poker face and played a trump card instead. "But this letter really does get us somewhere."

The First Investigator took a little pause for effect and enjoyed the tense faces of the others. "It is clear that this letter was not printed out by a computer printer, but manually typed. An interestingly, the typewriter is able to produce the French word 'fête' with the circumflex on the 'e'.

He pushed the paper into the middle of the table so that the other four could bend over it and see for themselves.

"Indeed," Ruth marvelled. "Well done, you have a keen eye."

Jupiter smiled somewhat embarrassed and cleared his throat. Then he asked Ruth where there was a typewriter shop in Sedona. He intended to check out the typewriters that could be used to produce accent marks.

"It's probably still open," Ruth said conciliatory. "When it's hot during the day like today, life takes place here in the evening. Some stores don't close until midnight."

"And then I have another big request," Jupe said and looked at the two friends a little uncertainly.

"I'm listening," said Ruth, resting both elbows on the table.

"Can you lend us your car for a day?" The last thing Jupiter felt like doing was spending another day on the bike in the blazing sun.

"Can we?" Chosmo said, "It's usually standing around anyway. Provided, of course, that one of you has a driver's licence."

Jupiter beamed at him. Ruth was a nice girl after all. Unfortunately, he thought, not as straightforward as her brother.

"You really think of everything," praised Pete.

"Also at paying," Jupe put himself in a good mood again. "Drinks are on me."

12. The Circumflex

In the still open computer and typewriter shop, Jupiter asked the owner about typewriters that could be used to produce characters with accent marks. Although the shop no longer has such typewriters, Jupiter was in luck as the owner knew something about such machines.

“The typewriters that you normally see has the QWERTY layout,” the man explained. “If you are using such typewriters for, say, French words, they are not going to give you the accent marks. For that purpose, there is an alternative key layout known as the AZERTY. Not only that the positioning of some letters are different, typewriters with such layouts could be used to produce the accent marks.

“There is a particular key on the right-hand side of the layout where you hit it once to type the accent mark but it doesn’t advance the carriage, so that you can type the letter below the accent mark. So in your case, the circumflex can be generated by first striking the ^ accent key, then the letter requiring the accent, say ‘e’, to produce the character ‘ê’. Cumbersome, but it gets the job done.”

They thanked the owner of the shop and left. After a ‘nightcap’, as Chosmo called it, in a small bistro, they parted. The two siblings from New York led The Three Investigators to their car, a yellow Honda, which was parked at a side street.

“Will you come by again tomorrow?” Ruth asked when saying goodbye and looked at Jupiter especially nicely.

“Gladly,” he answered and finally decided that Ruth was sympathetic after all.

They got into the car. Pete took the wheel. “What now?” he asked indecisively.

“We would have to know where Adeline lived,” Bob thought aloud.

“But we don’t know,” Jupe said. He was tired and wanted to go to bed. “We have this whole folder to read.” He tapped on the papers that Ruth and Chosmo had given them.

Bob and Pete were also in favour of returning to the youth hostel. The Second Investigator chauffeured them through the busy city. They took three more bottles of soda from the kitchen, went to their room and spread the documents on the upper bunk bed.

While Pete and Bob were lounging on the floor to browse through the documents, Jupiter made himself comfortable on his bed and kept staring at the blackmail letter while pinching his lower lip.

Jupiter sat up and looked down on the two friends from above. He didn’t let himself be distracted. “If you want the *fête de la musique* to take place...,” he murmured.

Suddenly, he jumped up. “Of course,” he shouted. “That’s it! We know that officially, the name of the music festival is in French, as in ‘*FETE DE LA MUSIQUE*’ and the posters for the concert are hanging all over the city. However, the words are all in upper-case letters! You may have heard that upper-case letters in French need not be accented, which was why the first ‘E’ in ‘*FETE*’ was not accented!”

“So what?” Pete remarked. “What’s the big deal about an accent mark?”

“In the blackmailer’s letter, ‘*fête de la musique*’ was typed in lower-case letters,” Jupiter said. “And the first ‘e’ of ‘*fête*’ has the circumflex!”

“So?” Pete repeated.

“So, the blackmailer, or at least, the one who typed the letter, did not just follow the posters, but was detailed enough to put in the accent mark. And he or she typed it with an AZERTY typewriter,” Jupiter explained. “Although not conclusive, this person understands French, so we could narrow down our suspects.”

Now Bob had stood up too. They’ve been learning French in high school for two years, but with varying success.

“So the blackmailer is French,” Pete summed up, “or he paid more attention in class than I did.”

“And me,” Bob added. “I never would have noticed those accent marks in my life.”

“Well, I’ll probably have to give Monsieur Fontaine some discreet hints about the extremely poor performance of the students Pete Crenshaw and Bob Andrews right after the holidays,” Juve told his friends.

They remained silent for a while. Bob and Pete again delved into Adeline’s series of articles and the reports about Walton. Some were illustrated.

“So far we know only one Frenchman,” Pete picked up the thread again. “Mr Jaubert.”

“But he really can’t be the blackmailer,” Bob threw in. Jupiter agreed with him.

“You forgot Hank, he had an accent too,” Pete joined in. “And besides, there’s something French about this whole Hancock family, at least as far as first names are concerned.”

“That’s true,” Jupiter said slowly. Inconspicuously, he massaged his stubbornly aching shoulder and wondered why the two of them hadn’t drilled him on it again.

“Here,” Pete marvelled. “You have to read this. Adeline had written a report on water consumption in Arizona.”

“Hear, hear,” said Jupiter pointedly, “You made fun of me on the plane.”

Pete ignored that remark. “This is very exciting. Since 1991, more than 100 pumps have been transporting water from the Colorado River to Phoenix.” He shook his head in disbelief. “You won’t believe how much this cost.”

Now Bob also bent over the article. “The world is crazy,” he said so fervently that Juve had to smile at his friends. “Four billion dollars! Four billion! The golf courses consume the most water. Then come the swimming pools, because there the laboriously pumped water also evaporates quite fast. This in turn increases the humidity.”

“She must have been a good journalist,” Jupiter intervened. “Considering the information she’s put together.”

“Hopefully we’ll learn more about her tomorrow.” Bob said.

“You know what?” Jupiter stretched out all fours from him. “I’m going to bed. Or did you find anything else exciting?”

“Plenty,” said Pete, “but it’s not going to go away.”

They went into the shower for a quick wash, and barely ten minutes later all three were in bed.

“By the way, Juve,” Bob said after they turned off the lights. “Wasn’t there something you wanted to tell us?”

“Sure,” the First Investigator replied, turning to his left, yawning loudly. “Tomorrow will be another day.”

13. A Hopi Indian Breaks Her Silence

The Three Investigators were down in the breakfast room early the next morning.

"We have big plans today," Jupiter said. He had slept much better than the night before and was very enterprising.

Mr Che greeted them laughing. "Sedona's night life isn't for you, is it?" he said and fetched a large pot of tea.

"How did you figure that out?" Bob asked.

"Miss Baxter phoned last night. But your room was quiet already."

"Did she leave a message?" Bob asked, hoping she had information on the tickets for the evening concert.

"She told me to tell you she doesn't need you today." Che put two jam jars on the table.

"Was there anything else?" Bob asked.

"Oh, yes. If you want to go to the concert, be at the motel at two today."

"Yippee!" Bob cried and piled two big spoons of jam on his bread.

Mr Che looked at the boys and laughed. "If you need anything else," he said, "I'll be in my office."

"If I understand you correctly," Jupiter said to Bob, "this non-stop show is an absolute must for you."

Bob nodded. "Do you mind?"

"Of course not." Jupe replied.

Pete followed Mr Che to ask if there was any news on the blackmail case. A few moments later he came back and the three were still alone in the breakfast room. It was a good opportunity for an interim review.

Jupiter summed up. They knew that, according to the city administration, the Walton company had something to do with the blackmail. They also knew what it produced and that it was currently shut down. And they knew that before Adeline Hancock disappeared, she must have been on the trail of something sinister.

"Our first stop is René, the second Marcel," Jupiter concluded. The other two nodded. "And then I guess we'll have to go back to Potter's Playground."

Bob did not want to believe that the music and video company should be involved in this blackmail case. But Jupiter reminded him that there had been hints in Adeline's series of articles that justified suspicion. Disgruntled, Bob remained silent.

"Do you still have that soil sample?" Pete asked to deviate them to a separate issue. "Ruth and Chosmo should know where to get this stuff checked out."

Jupe took out the tied handkerchief, let it oscillate over the jam and put it back in place. Then he started on his third bread.

"Good morning," someone from behind greeted them. It was the boy with the nickel-plated glasses whom they had met yesterday in the toilet. He was standing in the doorway. The Three Investigators greeted back and finished breakfast without a word.

"We're in a hurry," Bob said apologetically as the newcomer wanted to start a conversation with them, "because we're involved in a documentary." It was obvious to the

boy that he did not believe a word of it, but the desire for a conversation with the three braggarts had also disappeared.

“He has a completely wrong image of us now,” said Jupiter.

“Just like you did with Ruth,” Bob teased him. “Teasing represents a way to affirm interest in another. My mother always says that when I have trouble with Elizabeth.”

“Nonsense.” Jupiter blushed and threatened Bob with his fist. The girl from New York actually did not go out of his mind. He thought of Lys in Rocky Beach. He admired her because she looked so adorable and was already a well-known actress before she went back to college. And Lys admired him because he had so much on his mind, as she always said. Ruth was different, as Jupiter somehow found her combative and challenging. He only used to get that from boys.

They got in the Honda. A strange mist fell over the city. “Adeline wrote that it’s from all the watering,” Bob continued from last night’s conversation. “There are too many golf courses and swimming pools.”

“And irrigated cotton fields,” added Juve.

Bob had took out both the plan of the water supply system and the city map and directed Pete to M Street. They parked the car a good fifty metres from the house so as not to attract attention. There were nobody on the street anyway.

As they climbed up the three steps to the house entrance, the bell tower struck seven o’clock. At many windows, the blinds were still pulled down, but not so on the ground floor on the left side.

Jupiter pressed the bell. They waited in suspense. Nothing moved. He rang again. Again, nothing.

Pete watched the street. Then he put his index finger on his lips and pointed to the balcony parapet. It was only a metre and a half above the street. “I just want to have a look inside,” Pete said softly.

They walked the few steps back to the pavement. Pete swung himself with an elegant pull-up over the parapet.

A siren went off immediately.

“Bummer!” Bob cried. Pete swung perfectly back over the balcony parapet, and The Three Investigators trotted away.

“Slow down,” hissed Jupiter. “Not too noticeable.”

Soon they had reached the yellow Honda. Stealthily they looked around. There was still no one on the street, despite the continuous siren wailing.

“We just keep going,” commanded Jupiter. “René’s either not there or he doesn’t want to open. In any case, one of us needs to keep an eye on the house.” Bob and Pete nodded.

After about 500 metres they stopped at an old park bench under some trees to observe the course of things from a safe distance. Some shutters had gone up in the meantime, but nobody cared about the wailing siren.

Jupiter wanted to know from Pete whether he had seen anything in the apartment.

“Almost nothing. It was pretty dark in there. Except for—” He faltered.

“Except for what?” Jupiter asked.

“There was a strange thing hanging from the coat rack. Looked like, well, like a mask.”

“A what?” Jupiter looked at him in amazement.

“A mask,” Pete replied, scratching his head. “Like something from ‘Cats’. But the thing was shining funny.”

“Cats?” Bob did not immediately understand. Pete reminded him of the musical they had seen two years ago with Kelly and Elizabeth, in which the dancers were dressed up like cats

with stripes and lines.

“With stripes and lines,” Jupiter repeated quietly. He pinched his lip, then clapped his hands. “It wasn’t a mask,” he said firmly. “That was the red helmet of the biker from last night. I saw him very clearly.”

In the distance the siren finally died.

“Bob and I are going to Marcel’s,” Jupiter commanded and tapped Bob on the shoulder. “You, Pete, take care of René.”

“And the car?”

“You’ll take the car so that you can keep track of him if he leaves the house. If not, meet us here at the bench in one hour.” Jupe gave Pete an encouraging pat. “Same time, same station, okay?”

Only when they compared their watches did Jupe realize that he had imitated Ruth. He shook his head reluctantly and hoped that the two of them hadn’t noticed. But he avoided looking at them.

Jupiter and Bob watched Pete go up M Street to the north, then they turned into a side street towards K Street. Some school children ran into them. Two women went shopping.

Jupiter couldn’t stop thinking about the motorcycle helmet. This case was like a puzzle. He had the feeling that they would soon find some crucial clues.

“Maybe we overplayed ourselves—at least with the idea of solving the case in no time at all,” Bob recounted his thoughts as they approached the family home. “We’ll make a fool of ourselves with Jean if we show up empty-handed.”

The painful throbbing came up again in Jupiter’s shoulder, but it seemed weaker to him than the day before. He decided not to pay any further attention to it. “I think for not even a day’s work we have found out quite a lot,” he said. “What’s missing is a formula for putting the details together.”

Bob glanced at Jupe. Formulas were the First Investigator’s new passion. In chemistry lessons, he could hardly be stopped, not to mention maths and physics. Bob had his difficulties with those subjects and did not want to be reminded of them on this sunny holiday.

They stood in front of the house where Marcel lived. “Still looking pretty sleepy,” Jupiter remarked and rang the bell.

Almost in the next moment a key turned in the lock. The door was opened. They saw the Mexican girl’s face. In a flash Jupiter blocked the door with one foot so she could not close it. He actually felt stupid and pushy about it. The girl also immediately opened her eyes in fear. But Jupiter did not want to be shaken off a second time.

“We’re still looking for Mr Marcel Hancock,” he said calmly.

“He’s not here.” The girl pressed the door against his foot. She had dark brown eyes and a striking skin colour that was hardly different from her cinnamon brown T-shirt.

“Maybe he’s at René’s,” Bob interfered. She shook her head in a sad look. “Or with Adeline?”

“Adeline?” She winced sharply.

“What’s your name?” Bob asked, so as not to cut the conversation short.

“Sinagua,” she answered in a singing tone of voice that gave the name a special sound.

“We are Bob and Jupiter,” Bob said. “We must speak to Marcel. It is important. For him too.”

The girl thought hard. “All right.” With a jerk she opened the front door. “But Marcel is not here.” She looked at the boys imploringly. “Really not!” It was dark in the corridor. All except one room door were closed.

"Come with me into the kitchen." Sinagua went ahead. In one large room she opened the shutters. Jupiter and Bob looked around. The kitchen was very nicely furnished. A big old stove stood next to the window and a long wooden table in the middle.

"Nice place you got here." Bob liked this cosy kitchen right away.

The girl smiled for the first time. She had thick braided black hair that hung far down the back.

"Sit down, I'll make coffee." Without letting the boys out of her sight, she began to work at the stove.

"We come from near Los Angeles," Jupe began.

"You said that yesterday," the girl interrupted him with an impatience that did not match her previous appearance. "What do you know about Adeline?"

"Little," Bob admitted.

Jupiter thought it better to show off a little more. "We are on the trail of the blackmailer," he said.

She opened her eyes. "Really?"

The First Investigator nodded.

"But Marcel is really not here," she repeated. Hesitantly the girl approached them. Her eyes were wet. She straightened up, took a chair and sat on it. "You're not working with the police?"

"No," Bob and Jupiter answered almost simultaneously.

"I need your help." Suddenly she dropped her head and began to cry.

When Sinagua finally spoke, Jupiter wondered whether she had gained confidence in them or simply could no longer withstand the pressure.

Anyway, she wasn't from Mexico. She was Indian, her name meant 'without water' because she had grown up on the Hopi Indian reservation north of Flagstaff, in a place without any wells or irrigation.

Two years ago, she had come to Sedona, worked in one of the city's arts and crafts stores and met Adeline, who was working on a report about cheap jobs for Indians. Soon afterwards she also met the two Hancock brothers. She and Marcel fell in love, and actually they had wanted to marry this autumn, but postponed the wedding because of Adeline's disappearance.

The young Indian woman got up and poured coffee. Jupiter had the clear feeling that she was still keeping the most important things to herself. But he didn't interrupt her.

Marcel studied in Phoenix and he had a part-time job guiding tourist groups through Oak Creek, into the San Francisco Mountains, sometimes also into the Hopi Reservation or up the Colorado River to the Grand Canyon.

"He should have been back three days ago. He usually gets in touch if he is away longer," the girl said sadly. She looked at the boys for help.

"You were looking for the blackmailer?" she whispered. "I think... it could be Marcel."

14. On the Right Track

Bob made a face in disbelief. “Not every young man who goes three days without a word...” Jupiter put his hand on his forearm and gave him one of his typical ‘shut your mouth’ looks.

“Do you have any reason to support your suspicions?” he asked cautiously. He felt sorry for the girl, regardless of whether Marcel was the blackmailer or had possibly had an accident in the Grand Canyon.

Sinagua pulled the T-shirt smooth and embarrassed. Silently she looked at her guests with eyes widened.

“Does Marcel have a typewriter?” Bob asked suddenly. She shook her head.

“Is there a red truck around?” Bob wouldn’t let up, but he has not been successful.

The girl started crying again.

Jupe felt uncomfortable. He felt that it was better with the rebellious Ruth than a shy deer like Sinagua. “But you must have a reason for your suspicion,” he dared a new attempt.

“Ever since Adeline left, her brothers have been pulling out all the stops to clear her name,” Sinagua said, fingering for a handkerchief. “They’re desperate to prove the *Tribune* wrongfully fired her. But nobody believes them.”

“Do you believe them?” Jupiter asked.

Sinagua looked at them with big eyes. “I haven’t thought about that yet.”

“Why did she lose her job in the first place?” Bob tried a different subject.

“She was on the trail of something evil,” Sinagua said. “Something about water rights. Marcel and René know more about it.”

“Where’s René?”

“I could try to call him.” She pointed at the phone. “Should I?”

Jupiter nodded. The Indian rose wordlessly, dialled a number and waited. Nothing happened.

“Since yesterday it’s been cracking on the line like that,” the girl said absent-mindedly and hung up again.

“René was the motorcyclist yesterday?” Bob picked up the thread again.

At first Sinagua did not react at all, then she nodded hesitantly.

Jupiter looked at his watch. There were only ten minutes left until the meeting with Pete. They warned the girl not to tell anyone about her suspicions. Above all, she should not let reporters in if the press should come across the name Hancock in the course of their research into the blackmail case. And if Marcel showed up, Sinagua was to convince him to stay.

A water truck that was sprinkling the dusty asphalt passed so close to Pete that his legs got some refreshing splashes. The street slowly became a little more lively.

The Second Investigator decided to take a closer look at the surroundings. Without losing sight of the front door, of course. Almost at the same time as Bob two streets away, he too thought of the red truck they had seen at the Walton compound.

“That would fit if it was parked here,” Pete thought. But far and wide there was nothing like that—no truck and no Harley Davidson.

Pete crossed M Street and walked back under some old maple trees on the other side of the street until he reached the entrance. He would have loved to know if the alarm system was turned off. Then he would have done one more gymnastic leap over the parapet, but that was too risky for him.

He was staring at the front door from a distance. Suddenly, it opened and out came the friendly neighbour. Apparently she was an early riser. He did not want to run into her and so he quickly went behind one of the trees.

Maybe René stood behind a curtain and watched him. And maybe he thought he was a cop. Pete looked down on himself—faded jeans, red and blue t-shirt, red canvas shoes. If at all, he thought, he'll just be a cop in disguise at most.

Suddenly Pete heard a sound behind him. He turned around. A young man was standing right behind staring at him. Pete looked at the man in surprise. Reluctantly, the Second Investigator approached him.

"You're on the right track," the man said. He had a remarkably dark voice.

"Who are you?" Pete asked.

The man didn't seem to hear the question. "At 10 am at Mogollon Rim, Mile Post 240."

Then he went through a gate. Pete only heard footsteps that quickly moved away. The Second Investigator followed him. It was dark in that passageway. It took his eyes a moment to get used to it.

When there was more light, he decided to run. But he barely ran five metres, then he tripped on something and fell to the hard ground. At the last moment he was able to break his fall with his hands. He pulled himself up. There was no sound of footsteps anymore. Instead, in the dim light, he saw a string stretched tautly twenty centimetres above the ground. Pete cursed and looked at his bruised palms. They hurt a lot.

"Unfair it was," he murmured. "I'll get you for this." Indecisively, he looked around. Two staircases each went up to the left and right. He guessed that there was no point in looking for that man.

He stepped out through the gate onto M Street. A lot of questions were buzzing around in his head. Who was that? Was it René? What was he up to? And where on earth was the Mongolian Rim?

The Second Investigator looked around. The street was still relatively empty. He refrained from ringing Hancock's doorbell again. Instead, he took the path to the meeting place. He felt the urgent need to tell Bob and Jupiter about his encounter with the man who apparently knew quite a lot and confirmed that they were on the right track.

"You must have seen what he was wearing." Bob stood shaking his head in front of Pete. They had exchanged their experiences, but Pete could not quench the other two's thirst for knowledge.

"I don't know. I told you already. It all happened so fast." He frowned. "Black jeans, I think. Or motorcycle leather pants?"

"And what did he look like?" Jupe wanted to know.

"Nice," Pete replied spontaneously, "kind of nice."

"A little more precisely," Bob interrupted him impatiently, "was it René or not? And why was the line taut? Just to shake you off?"

Pete let his hand clap annoyingly on the roof of the yellow Honda. "How should I know? Am I psychic? We have to get to the Mongolian Rim, then we'll know!"

“Stop it,” Jupiter tried to mediate. He had made up his mind. “I’ll buy you all a second breakfast,” he said, suggesting that they go to one of the little bistros on the main street. There he would tell them his cactus story and his knock-out at the Walton compound before they set off for the meeting place with Mr John Doe.

They found an open bistro with newspapers. They did not contain any new information. Jupiter ordered marble cake and cocoa for everyone and started with his bicycle accident.

“Yesterday, out there, I probably just stepped away in the scorching heat for a moment, also because of the constant pain, I was really beat. I guess I just collapsed and hit my head against something,” he concluded. “You should know that before we go out there now. It could be that the whole thing is not safe. I think I’m okay now. But who knows? In this heat?”

They remained silent for a while. Jupiter looked around questioningly.

“But you could have confessed that cactus mishap right away,” Bob said reproachfully after a sip of cocoa.

“But then Aunt Mathilda would never have let him go,” Pete came to the friend’s aid.

“Also true.” Bob emptied the cocoa cup in one go. “And what do we learn from this?” he imitated his father.

Jupiter shrugged his shoulders. “If you must know, I really do feel better today. But, well,” he squinted at his shoulder, “it still pinches.”

“Let me see.” Pete stood up and bent over him. Jupiter willingly pulled down the neckline of his T-shirt.

“Looks like measles,” the Second Investigator expertly judged. “Why don’t you go to a pharmacy and get something?”

“But only after we get back from the Mongolen Rim,” Jupiter decided with relief and looked at his watch. He was glad that he had finally told the whole story. “We have to go. Who knows how far that is from here.” He got up, went to the girl at the cash register to pay, and asked about the Mongolen Rim.

He came back laughing. “I may be stricken, but not mentally, like you,” he teased Pete. “Your Mongolen Rim, maybe that’s in Mongolia. There is a place in Arizona is called Mogollon Rim.” The Second Investigator turned scarlet red.

“Never mind,” Bob joked as he pushed Juve aside amicably. “Now that it has turned out that not even Mr Jones is infallible, we too can afford the odd slip-up.”

15. Appointment with a Blackmailer

The Mogollon Rim is located to the east and southeast of Sedona. As they drove south towards Camp Verde, the more breathtaking the landscape became. Along the way, they passed the Chapel of the Holy Cross—a concrete cross that was built out of the rock and was surrounded by a small church. The area was barren, no trees, only cacti standing at the roadside and a huge number of dried palm trees.

After Camp Verde, they went onto State Route 260. It was scorching hot again, but the wind that came through the open windows did the silent trio good.

“There!” Jupiter suddenly pointed to a weathered mile post. They stopped and got out.

“It’s Mile Post 230 here!” Bob had discovered two barely visible numbers. They looked around. Not a soul in sight. They only heard twittering birds.

They went back to the car and drove further slowly. The path was lined with small red rocks and almost grey bushes. The scenery was breathtaking.

A while later, they reached Mile Post 240. Pete stopped. He looked at his watch. “Ten to ten.”

“Nervous?” asked Jupiter, without expecting an answer.

“If he’s as nice as he looks, he’ll be on time.” Pete felt this certain tingling in his stomach, which he knew only too well.

“This really looks like a movie set,” Bob distracted himself. “I can’t believe the things Mother Nature comes up with.”

They heard steps behind a small group of bushes.

“And now here comes John Wayne,” Pete tried to joke while they stared intently at the bushes. The first thing they saw was a hand pushing branches aside, then a man. “That’s him!” Pete cried.

The man nodded. “I am René Hancock. The one you seek.” He went up to the baffled boys and reached out his hand to them.

Jupiter was the first to react. “I am Jupiter Jones,” he replied. “These are my friends Pete Crenshaw and Bob Andrews.”

“Uh-huh.” René Hancock had a pleasant tone of voice and spoke casually as if they had met by chance at a café. “I’ve already met Pete. Sorry about the cord. But I didn’t need a chase this morning.”

The man was tall, slim, about thirty and dark-haired. He actually wore black leather pants and looked likeable.

“Come with me, I’ll show you something,” he said and made an inviting gesture that reminded the Second Investigator of his first encounter with Hancock.

“Not so hasty!” Pete cried. “Why are you the one we’re looking for?” Jupiter and Bob also did not want to follow the stranger so easily.

René came back up to them and grinned. “I won’t run away or hustle you,” he promised. “I have other plans.”

“We would like to know more about that,” Jupiter said somewhat opaquely. All René had to do now was to pull out a pistol and he would be in control of everything. However, Jupiter

could not see any signs of him carrying a weapon and he had nothing in his hands either. Also, René was quite relaxed about the detectives.

“What do you want to show us?” Bob asked sternly.

“My office,” Hancock remained equally friendly. “Right over there in a cave.” He pointed to the Red Rocks.

Jupe thought he was pulling his leg. He shook his head gruffly. He could not stand such confusing situations. He told Hancock he had to answer a few questions first.

“I don’t really have to,” Hancock said. “But I will if you want me to.”

“Why did you call us here?” Jupiter asked.

“I’ve been watching you since yesterday. You were at Walton’s place,” Hancock continued calmly. “Me too.”

“Oh?” Bob said. “There you go.”

“I was looking for documents. But that crook took everything.”

Jupiter lost his patience. “It’s all too colourful for me, Mr Hancock. Why don’t you start at the beginning?”

René looked silently at them. “Okay.” His story was quickly told:

In the course of her research for the series ‘The City We Live In’, his sister Adeline had come across an illegal trade in water rights. In addition, Hendrik Walton had started his production activities in the water protection area, although he only had a permit for trial operations there.

Adeline knew that her chief editor and Walton were good friends, so one night she wanted to smuggle the story into the paper past everyone. It was unsuccessful, because someone in the typesetting room alerted the chief editor. He threw the article out and the next morning Adeline was dismissed.

“She was desperate,” said René. His voice became somewhat softer. “Two months earlier, our parents had been killed in a car accident. They had asked Adeline to pick them up at the airport in Phoenix. But she was in the middle of her research and had appointments that she didn’t want to cancel. The rental car that our parents finally took had faulty brakes. They crashed into a tree near Rock Springs.”

“Where is Adeline now?” Jupiter asked after a long silence. “On the East Coast?”

René shook his head. “She scraped together her life savings and joined the Hopi Indians.”

“What exactly were you doing at Walton’s?” Bob asked.

“Help my sister,” René replied slowly. “This thing must be completed.” He looked down. “I went to law school. Legally, there’s almost no chance of stopping them.”

Hancock had hoped to find documents in the company to support Adeline’s suspicions. “No, I can’t find any,” he said, disappointed, “but I saw you.” He turned to Pete. “You, more precisely, the way you picked the locks to open the gate, well done!”

“But why did you blackmail the city?” the Second Investigator asked in amazement. He had almost forgotten the nasty trick with the string and the scratches on his palms.

“Of course, I will not induce poison,” René said. “I never intended to. I don’t have anything like that.”

“That’s no justification,” Bob said a little too sharply and rubbed his forehead. He was soaking wet with sweat, but he didn’t notice because of the tension.

For Hancock, this gesture came at just the right moment. “You see,” he said, wiping his own forehead, “it used to be hot and dry in many areas here in the southwest. Now it’s hot and humid.”

“We also read Adeline’s article on water consumption,” Bob waved. “But blackmail...”

"I saw no other way to shake up the city," Hancock reiterated. "Now they can't hush it up anymore."

"You must turn yourself in to the police," Jupiter said.

"I never intended anything else. But first I want to show you something."

Jupiter made it clear to the other two that he felt just as uncomfortable as they did. It was out of the question that they were working with a blackmailer, even though he supposedly never wanted to make good on his threat. However, there were obviously much bigger crooks in Sedona than the one who now stood sadly in front, waiting for them.

"Very well," Jupe decided. "I'm going with you." He looked at Bob and Pete. "If I'm not back in half an hour, go back to town and call the police."

The small cave actually deserved the name office. On a small table stood a typewriter—an AZERTY typewriter, as Jupiter noticed with a single glance at the layout. Hancock was even equipped with tape recorder and mobile phone.

"When are you planning for your next step?" Jupiter asked and pointed to the letter.

Adeline's brother hesitated. "I originally intended to... until I saw you at Walton's."

In a final letter to no less than a hundred addressees in the city, René Hancock wanted to draw attention to his sister's story in the hope that at least some of the journalists present would take the topic up.

"Now I have another idea," he explained and politely offered Jupiter one of the two camping chairs. He walked over to a large black briefcase, which stood in a corner. The First Investigator followed each of Hancock's movements. He didn't consider him unpredictable, otherwise he wouldn't have followed him into the lion's den. But he'll never know.

Hancock took neither a knife nor a pistol out of the case, but a red folder. "You were at the *Tribune* yesterday," he said.

"You really know almost everything," Jupiter replied in surprise. Hancock pulled a piece of paper and a newspaper from the folder. It was part of Adeline's manuscript, but only the beginning.

"May I?" Jupiter took the article and skimmed through the text. No concrete accusations were made in the report. Hancock had found this sheet in his sister's files after she had joined the Indians. The article carried a date from last March. Then he held the paper against the sunlight that came through the narrow cave entrance. "A copy."

"One more thing," Hancock said. His voice sounded hollow. "Adeline took it all so hard, she started taking drugs. She's been in rehab with the Hopis for four months because there's been no treatment for her anywhere."

Hancock looked desperate. He was silent for a while.

Jupiter held the paper against the sun once more. "What is this?" On the lower left side there was a sign, a small circle with a cross inside."

"The manufacturer's mark, perhaps," Hancock replied.

Jupiter pinched his lower lip. He had seen circles like that before. But where? He let the possibilities pass in his mind—their trailer, the salvage yard, as well as Aunt Mathilda's kitchen. He thought of Pete's and Bob's room.

"School!" he said in a low voice. In his mind's eye appeared the fax machine in the secretary's office at Rocky Beach High School. When Miss Greenwood, the secretary, sent a fax, the originals came out at the bottom with exactly the same sign. Jupiter looked at Hancock and decided not to tell him about his discovery just yet.

"What about school?" Hancock asked.

“Nothing.” Jupiter quickly changed the subject. “Why did you ask about the *Tribune*?”

“I can’t go there, some people know me. But you could check the archives and see if you find anything.”

“Sure. If I get this sheet,” Jupiter said quickly. “And if you turn yourself in to the police today.”

Hancock nodded tiredly.

René stowed everything in the red folder and handed it over to Jupiter. “Too bad,” he said quietly, “that I didn’t get to know you earlier. You guys are really sharp.”

“What do you expect from now?” asked Jupiter seriously.

“I don’t know.” René Hancock shrugged his shoulders, took his red helmet off the table and walked ahead.

Only now did Jupiter see the Harley lying behind a bush at the cave entrance. Hancock swung into the saddle and started. Behind the machine the sand was whirling up. Hancock rolled very close to Jupiter. His eyes seemed a little moist. “Depends on the lawyer. You may cross your fingers for me.”

In silence, they drove back to Sedona. “Maybe they’ll release him soon,” said Pete as they plunged into the streets of the old town.

“Unlikely. After all, he was scaring a whole city for days,” Bob objected.

“No big deal.” Pete pointed with a sweeping hand movement across the large square which was now buzzing with people. “Everything seem normal, doesn’t it?”

“Blackmail is blackmail.” Bob wouldn’t let up. He also felt sorry for Hancock, who had obviously found himself in a hopeless situation. “But where do we end up if we resort to such means? That’s just criminal.”

“Now we only need to find those who have resorted to even more criminal means,” said Jupe. He felt it was a fruitless argument. Everyone was right.

Pete drove on to the Sedona Sun Motel. Jean was in her room, sorting through the documentary’s papers. Without much enthusiasm, The Three Investigators told her that they had solved the blackmail case.

“Madness!” cried Jean. “You are the greatest! You found him, and in such a short time!”

“Actually, he found us,” the First Investigator said.

But Jean was unstoppable. She wanted to do an interview with the blackmailer the very next day. She only realized that the whole thing was no fun when the boys made it clear to her that it would hardly be possible. René could be behind bars by then.

Jean reached into her handbag. “Here are the concert tickets. You can go to rehearsals if you want.”

Bob happily took the tickets. The Three Investigators were cheerful when they went out from Jean Baxter’s room.

“And now?” asked Jupiter as they walked through the gloomy corridor back to the small reception hall.

“I’m thirsty. Let’s have a quick drink here at the hotel bar,” Pete suggested. “And then we’ll put a stop to these environmental criminals.”

Jupiter did not believe that this would happen in the blink of an eye. And at the same time he fervently hoped that he was wrong. He let Pete and Bob go ahead. “I have some work to do,” he said and was gone before they could turn around.

16. The Fax Transmission Log

When Jupiter showed up back in her room, Jean Baxter was still so impressed by the success of The Three Investigators that she immediately agreed to use her good relations as a representative of the press to get the three detectives an appointment with the Director of the Water Management Department. She gave Jupe her list of questions, which she had prepared anyway for her conversation with the director.

Thoughtfully Jupiter went back to the hotel bar. Bob and Pete were slouched at the bar.

"That has never happened to us before," said the Second Investigator, while Jupiter swung himself onto one of the stools. "Now we have the culprit, but the case is far from solved. Somehow I'd like to help Hancock."

"Me too," Bob said, stretched. "But don't think I'm going to miss the concert." He pulled the tickets out of his jacket pocket and let them slip through his fingers with relish. "Seven groups in one show, and The Wave is the highlight." Suddenly he startled. "Look!"

Pete and Jupiter leaned towards him. On the back of the tickets, the Walton company advertised a new eco-paper. There was also a note that at the beginning of the concert Mr Hendrik Walton would personally present three young artists with a scholarship that he had offered.

"If Walton is with us tonight, why not just wait for him?" Bob saw a good opportunity to make sure that The Three Investigators were definitely going to the concert.

"But we don't have a case on our hands," Pete contradicted. "You heard what Hancock said."

Jupiter pinched his lower lip. Then he pulled out the copy of Adeline's manuscript. "The fact that we don't have a case is not entirely true. Maybe this will help." Jupiter pointed to the circle with the little cross. "And also, we have a two o'clock appointment with a certain John Brown." He made a dramatic pause. "He is the Director of the Water Management Department."

"Well done!" cried Pete. He had actually wanted to pat Jupe's shoulder but stopped at the last moment. "By the way, what about the pharmacy?"

"Later," the First Investigator decided categorically. "Now we're going to see Ruth and Chosmo, and then to that Brown guy."

Sedona lay in blinding sunlight. They drove from the motel onto the main road and found a parking space near the office of the *Tribune*. With quick steps they turned into the side street. The friendly woman at the entrance let them through today without asking much. Pete took the lead through the old corridors.

Again there was only Ruth in the small office. "Have you heard?" she asked without greeting when the boys entered. "The blackmailer has been caught."

"Really?" Jupiter could not resist mimicking the unsuspecting. Then he put on a knowing smile. "There can be no question of being caught. He promised to turn himself in." He enjoyed Ruth's amazement.

Pete felt that Hancock had a right to have the facts properly presented, even though if it is only in the local newspaper. Ruth offered them a seat, and then the three of them told her in

detail about their experiences in the morning.

Ruth was amazed. "But a quarter of an hour ago in our editorial meeting, it all sounded very different." She shook her head in disbelief. "And Chosmo just called from City Hall. There they are all running through the corridors with swollen heads because Sedona's police were so successful."

"That's the way of the world," Pete made a serene comment.

Jupiter spoke up. "I have one more favour to ask from you." He pulled the copied manuscript sheet out of his pocket, folded it up and handed it to the girl. "This document has been faxed probably from here and probably around 12 March."

"Where did you get this from?" she asked.

"We'll explain later," the First Investigator told her impatiently.

"No, you explain it to me now," Ruth said firmly. "You want something from me, don't you? Then I want to be in on it."

Jupiter blushed because he realized that he had once again been too brash. Besides, he was getting to like her style more and more.

Pete beat him to it. "Hancock gave that to us," he said. "Do you have a fax transmission log here?"

Ruth nodded. "In a cupboard in the telex room."

"Can you get to it?" Jupiter asked and then he added a somewhat hesitant: "Please."

"You bet. But you have to help me."

"I don't like the word 'help'," the First Investigator mimicked Ruth.

She glared at him and laughed. "You're a pretty tough cookie," she remarked.

Jupiter countered with a failed attempt at a gallant bow.

"Stop this childishness," Pete grinned at them. Ruth and Jupiter pulled their heads in and pretended to sneak out of the room guiltily.

The girl took the lead. Halfway to the archive was the telex room, not even six square metres in size. An old-fashioned telex rattled. The room was empty.

"See if anyone comes." With a firm grip, Ruth reached into a drawer and took a key out.

At the other end of the hall a door opened. "Someone's coming," Jupiter whispered to the girl.

A man in a blue coat approached her. "What are you doing here?"

"We... we..." Bob stuttered.

"We were on our way to see you." Ruth stuck her head out of the room. In an exquisitely polite tone, she asked the man to show her three friends the telex and fax machines. Jupiter thought that no person could resist her radiant smile.

The face of the clerk brightened immediately. The six square metres were obviously his kingdom. "Be ready to ask any questions you want, Miss Ruth," he whispered and bent over one of the machines. Behind his back, Ruth pointed to the cupboard in the corner.

The Three Investigators understood. Immediately they built a wall behind the man and involved him in a detailed conversation about the history and purpose of the machines, whether teleprinters with Chinese characters were also made, and about the features of modern fax machines.

Shielded behind them, Ruth silently fiddled with some pieces of paper. "You must know," she said when she had found what she was looking for, "my friends come from the country. They don't know much about these devices." She thanked the clerk and they all left the room.

It was difficult for The Three Investigators to hold back their laughter until they were back in Ruth's office.

But as it turned out, Ruth didn't mean it to be that funny. "You're different from most guys I know in New York. Not as arrogant as them." She puffed up her cheeks and paraded boys from the big city on the East Coast. And they laughed again.

Then Ruth handed a piece of paper to the leader of The Three Investigators. Jupiter noticed it with satisfaction.

A phone number and a date were written on it. Jupiter waved the copy through the air. "On that day, this sheet was faxed from here to this number." He turned to Ruth again. "You must have a directory with the fax numbers."

Ruth brought him the local directory of Sedona, and the first thing he looked up under W for Walton. But the number didn't match the one Adeline had sent her fax to.

Ruth looked at the number again. "The number looks like one from near the airport."

"Near the airport?" Bob echoed. "Near the airport is Potter's Playground!"

Bob had hit the nail on the head. The sheet had actually been faxed to the music company. At 8:47 pm, shortly before the editorial deadline for that edition. Thanks to the vigilance of a typesetter and the determination of the chief editor, that edition was published without Adeline's story.

"What's the meaning of this now?" Ruth looked at the group at a loss.

"That we still have another suspect," Jupiter said. "And we're gonna get him right now."

But before that, Pete and Bob insisted on satisfying their hunger. They also reminded Jupiter that he had an appointment at the city hall.

"And there is one more thing," Pete said when they stopped at a hamburger stand. "I think you should go to the pharmacy first."

Instead of an answer, Juve bit his cheeseburger so heartily that Bob and Pete decided not to worry any more for the time being.

17. The Dirty Business with Water

It was just as hot as the day before. In front of the city hall, huge water sprinklers blasted the lawn. “Four billion dollars for transporting water,” Bob said scornfully.

Pete found a place in the semi-shade. He grabbed Jean’s papers and they went up the stairs to the entrance. The barriers had been cleared in the meantime, but there were still numerous camera teams in the foyer. In one of the corridors, Mr Welles gave an interview.

“Not again.” Pete turned away with a grimace. The Water Management Department was located on the third floor. A large information board showed them the way.

When they had arrived on the third floor, Jupiter remembered that he had forgotten something else. “Without water,” he growled and Pete understood immediately.

Pete found two coins in his pocket and jumped down the stairs. “I’ll catch up!” he shouted.

Jupiter and Bob stood in front of the door of the director’s office. “Brown,” they read on the sign. Jupiter knocked.

“Come in,” said a youthful voice. The two boys entered a friendly room, which was furnished completely differently from the press officer’s room. A young African-American woman with pinned-up hair and strikingly colourful glasses was sitting behind a desk.

“We have an appointment with Mr John Brown,” said Jupiter. “We are from NTV—Jupiter Jones and Bob Andrews.

The woman began to laugh. “It’s Joan Brown,” she said and stood up to greet them. “I’m Joan Brown, Director of the Water Management Department.”

“Sorry, we got your first name wrong,” Jupiter apologised.

Bob countered with a whisper: “What do you mean by ‘we’?” Jupe promptly ignored that question.

The director offered them two chairs, crackers and iced tea.

A moment later, there was a knock at the door. Pete appeared, and he too looked at the woman first and then at Jupiter questioningly.

“You’ve come to the right place,” Jupiter said quickly. “This is Pete Crenshaw, and this is Joan Brown, the Director of the Water Management Department.” Pete did not let his surprise show. Wordlessly, he pulled up a chair.

“And what can I do for you?” Mrs Brown asked.

“It’s about Sedona’s water rights,” Jupe began. And then they told in short sentences what they had found out in the past one and a half days. The longer the woman listened to them, the more open they became. In the end, Pete even confessed his entry into Mr Walton’s production facilities and Jupiter pulled out both the copy of Adeline’s story and the stolen plan.

Joan Brown had been silent throughout the narrative. Even when The Three Investigators ended, she said nothing for a long time. “I’ve only been appointed to this office a few weeks ago,” she finally said.

“Around the city, and also in other parts of Arizona, there have been rumours of illegal or semi-legal trade for years, and the matter was quite simple. Someone obtained documents on the economic situation of the companies, farmers and private individuals who owned water

rights. Then he offered money to those who were in financial difficulties. The rights were sold and sublet to interested customers by the new owner.

"This is not allowed," she said. "Our law forbids it. If, however, the buyer and seller keep quiet for five years, the matter is time-barred—meaning there is nothing we can do about it."

"Do you have any suspicions about Sedona?" Pete interfered.

The woman hesitated. "I do. But I'm not very far into it yet, because the people concerned have found it beneath their dignity to talk to me." She paused again. "This can sometimes be an advantage." The boys looked at her without understanding.

"That's really all I can tell you. Not now," Mrs Brown finally said. "I'd have to have a little talk with this Adeline first."

"Did Walton have anything to do with this?" Bob tried to probe again. "Why does such a modern factory not operating?"

"There was a problem with the sewage. That's why they first had to create a canal."

"And Jaubert?" Jupiter asked.

"Jaubert?" The director expressed surprise. "What makes you think he's involved? I thought so far..." She paused and then made an energetic gesture. "It was really nice to meet you. But I can tell you no more."

Disappointed, Jupiter presented Mrs Brown with Jean's list of questions. Mrs Brown took a look and said: "No problem. As far as the questions that concern my department, you'll get the answers back tomorrow. To make a documentary on the sidelines of the music festival, it's a big burden on the environment." She got up. Bob and Pete pulled unhappy faces, but had no idea how to get Joan Brown to tell them more.

"Will you come to the concert tonight?" Bob asked. She said yes. All of Sedona will be on its feet and so would she.

Outside, Jupe first wanted to know what Pete had achieved by contacting Sinagua.

The Second Investigator snapped his fingers as they slowly descended the stairs. "Marcel has contacted her. He'll be back in an hour. Other than that, there is nothing."

"Then we will wait for him at K Street," Jupiter announced.

"We won't," Bob defiantly remarked. "We're going to the concert rehearsals now. You don't see that every day. You also wanted to see Jaubert."

Jupiter was not keen on arguing. "Fine," he said faintly. "Marcel can only confirm what we already know."

On the way to Potter's Playground, Pete suddenly stopped. "You are going in there now," he said to Jupiter and pointed at a pharmacy. "Otherwise, we're not going any further. This is a blackmail."

"Okay," Jupe sighed grinning, "I'm giving way to violence."

He got out of the car and disappeared into the pharmacy. After two minutes, he came back and reported that after looking at his shoulder, the pharmacist had touted a foul-smelling ointment on him and announced serious consequences if he did not apply it in the morning and evening. "By the way," Jupiter said cheerfully, "the pharmacist bore a certain resemblance to Aunt Mathilda."

Bob had found a programme of the concert and he was so enthusiastic that it was hard to stop him. Only five or six different numbers would be played throughout the evening, but by fifteen performers. "A mad idea," he raved. "Fifteen times—'Stairways to Heaven'." He began to sing at the top of his voice. "There's a lady who's sure..."

"Led Zeppelin," Jupe blurted out. Before Bob could express amazement at the omniscience of their leader, Pete explained to him that that was Lys's current favourite song.

They rolled onto the huge car park right next to Potter's Playground, got out and strolled leisurely over to the gate. Their names were registered with the doorman. "You can go see Hank in the office," the man said, describing the shortest route to them.

The concert on the big stage in the hangar was to begin at seven o'clock with a supporting programme. There were still a good two hours to go. An Australian group was rehearsing. It sounded surprisingly soft.

"Unplugged," Bob commented expertly, "without the giant amplifier."

Pete and Jupiter were also fascinated by the crackling atmosphere. Technicians were running around. Musicians and some band singers were sitting outside putting on make-up, and two men were dragging huge flower pots. Next to a mobile camper, a cellist was sitting and tuning her instrument as if she was all alone in the world.

Jupiter was happy about the cool temperatures that prevailed in the office building. Hank greeted the boys friendlily.

"Look at all the fun you have," he suggested and hurried to the door. "Your boss has already signed up."

"And when is Mr Walton coming?" Jupiter asked quickly.

Hank looked at his watch. "In about an hour he's meeting with the boss." He made an impatient gesture. "I'm sorry I can't spend more time with you, but..."

"Hank," they heard a shrill voice behind the office door, "what about the arrangement now?"

"Sorry," said the dread-locked man before disappearing.

In the anteroom, Juve let himself plop down on a narrow wooden bench.

"What's wrong?" Bob looked at him suspiciously.

"I'm in pain right now. Besides, I think I need to take care of my shoulder." He took out the ointment and Bob held his nose.

"I'll make a suggestion," Jupiter continued, while he carefully dabbed the inflamed area with the white cream and then rubbed it in. "We split up. You look around, I'll take care of myself. We'll meet back here in an hour."

Bob and Pete didn't need to be told twice. In such forays as they now intended, Jupiter was always just a brake.

That Jupiter did not feel well was only part of the truth. He made sure that nobody was listening to him. Then he went to the public phone hanging on the wall. Barely a quarter of an hour later he was finished and walked in front of the office building.

"Now things are taking their course," he said aloud to himself. He blinked into the sun, which again stood like a ball of fire in the sky. He made himself comfortable on a weathered wooden bench, in the shade of a huge oleander. He started singing softly, "There's a lady who's sure..."

18. A Bluff is Successful

After well over an hour, Jupe was disturbed by the heat. The bench on which he had sat so comfortably had emerged from the shadow of the oleander. There was no sign of Pete and Bob.

Jupiter waited another three minutes, then he got up. He went over to the office building and as he entered, he saw from the corner of his eye his two friends appear at a distance. If they do not get to witness the beginning of the end, he thought, was just the punishment for being late.

A little more energetically than he wanted, he knocked on the door with the inscription 'Jaubert'. Without waiting for a reaction, Jupiter opened the door and stepped in.

Mr Jaubert was sitting at his desk, digging through papers. A little irritated, but not unfriendly he looked at his visitor. Then he recognized him. "You're one of the guys from NTV, right?"

The First Investigator nodded. "I have an appointment with Mr Walton," he said. "His office told me I could meet him here."

Jaubert did not seem surprised. "That's right, he should be here by now." He looked over his desk, overflowing with papers, on which music CDs were piled up. "Would you wait outside?" he asked pleasantly. "We've got these scholarship awards coming up, I've got to..."

"No, I've got to talk to you now," Jupiter interrupted him firmly.

Jaubert looked up, surprised, but did not say anything.

Jupe did not wait for a response, instead he continued: "What do you know about Adeline Hancock?"

The First Investigator was prepared for various reactions from Jaubert—that he threw him out, yelled at him or simply let him leave. However, Jupiter was not prepared for the helpless gesture with which he dropped his arms and now more hung than sat in his chair. "Adeline," he whispered.

At the same moment, there was a knock. Again a visitor came who did not wait for a reaction. With one big step, Hendrik Walton entered the room. Jupiter recognized him immediately by the oversized Stetson.

"Hello!" he shouted. "How are you, old Frenchman? You look a little stressed, but it's no wonder with this—" Only now did his eyes fall upon Jupiter. He fell silent as if he had just revealed a secret.

"Hello, Hendrik," said Jaubert wearily. He had turned pale and dabbed the sweat from his forehead with a silk handkerchief. "This is the young man who has an appointment with you."

"With me?" Walton looked at Jupiter sharply. "I have an appointment with three aspiring young artists, and no one else."

"Oh, yeah." Jupe went to the door and waved Pete and Bob in. They were just outside and Jupiter suspected they had been listening. The reason for this was that Bob winked at him when he came in, as if he was well-informed about everything.

“What is this?” Jaubert startled. “A crowd, or what?” But his attempt to protest seemed miserable.

“Take it easy,” said Jupiter. “Besides, we’re not all here yet.” Then he turned to Walton, who was silently standing there. “My name is Jupiter Jones, and these are my friends Pete Crenshaw and Bob Andrews. You should remember our names, because they will change your life. Like that of...” he pronounced the name particularly slowly and clearly, “Adeline Hancock.”

For a moment, Walton gasped for breath. Then he rumbled off. He shouted something about ‘rascals’ and ‘snotty boys’, who he wouldn’t put up with and who had no right to question him. He commanded that Jaubert should throw them out of his office.

“The interrogation hasn’t even started yet,” Jupiter stated dryly. “And Monsieur Jaubert won’t throw us out, but he will answer some questions.”

Jaubert was still hanging in his armchair and made no attempt to obey Walton’s request. Maybe, Pete thought, because his visitors were three to one in favour of them.

“He’s afraid,” the First Investigator whispered to Bob and Pete, “but not of us.”

“I don’t think it will work like that, Hendrik,” Jaubert said. Apparently, he had now regained some of his composure and had come to terms with the fact that there were these guys in his office who knew quite a lot and that the game was over.

“Good afternoon,” said a voice behind them. Joan Brown was in the doorway. “I hear there’s something here for me.”

It dawned on Pete and Bob that Jupe had done more than just tend to his shoulder in the last hour. Bob whispered, “Welcome to the meeting of the environmental criminals.”

“In front of witnesses,” Jupiter said very theatrically at this moment and pointed to the Director of the Water Management Department, “and in front of a very competent woman that you have been manipulating water rights for years...” He then pulled Aunt Mathilda’s handkerchief out of his pocket and turned to Walton. “And that you have spilled poison into the cotton fields. Here’s the proof.”

Walton looked as if he wanted to pounce on Jupiter. To be on the safe side, Joan Brown went in between with two quick steps. “May I introduce myself?” she said calmly. “My name is Joan Brown, and I am the Director of the Water Management Department.” Walton opened his eyes wide.

Joan Brown continued: “And if you are Mr Hendrik Walton, then I have already asked you twice for a meeting at the city hall. But you obviously don’t talk to just anyone.” She gave him a look that showed the disapproval of his arrogance and rudeness.

Through the open door Jupiter noticed a movement in the anteroom. For a moment, he let the massive entrepreneur out of his sight. “Jean,” he cried, “In here!”

This works out wonderfully, it shot through Bob’s head. Jean Baxter entered, close behind her was Chelsea with her camera and Simon. Monsieur Jaubert’s not exactly small office now resembled the crowded waiting room of a famous dentist.

“How do you respond to the allegations against you?” Almost immediately, Jean stretched out a microphone to the baffled Walton.

The Three Investigators realized suddenly that Chelsea hadn’t even started shooting yet. But Walton obviously did not realize it. “Off the mic!” he shouted. “Drop the camera!”

“Wait a minute!” As if on command, everyone turned to Jaubert. “Please close the door,” he asked. “We have enough listeners here already.”

Jupiter thought Jaubert had unconsciously hoped that what came out now would not leave the room. But that would not work out.

Chelsea took her camera off her shoulder. Simon and Jean stood beside her.

Jaubert began haltingly. After a few sentences, when Walton realized what was happening, he tried to slow him down, but Jaubert talked as if he is in a trance and could not be stopped.

He confessed to the story of Potter's Playground and the problems with waste disposal years ago. The mountains of waste were getting higher and higher, so were the fees. Walton offered to help the company and illegally dump the waste. Jaubert, who was under financial pressure, agreed.

Since then, the jovial paper manufacturer had him in his hand. With Jaubert as the front man, he looted water rights in the area from private individuals. During two particularly dry summers he maintained the water supply to the city, which is why he was granted permission to build his factory in the water protection area.

Until four months ago, poison leaked into the groundwater. At that time, as Mr Carmichael had reported, the city had to be supplied by water trucks for several days.

Jaubert looked thoughtlessly through the window into the distance. Jupe thought he knew what was going on inside him. Jaubert saw himself as an artist, and he would have loved to be slapped in the face for getting involved with a money man like Walton in his time of need. In any case, he was obviously terribly embarrassed by all this.

The manager of Potter's Playground turned back to the group in his office. His back tensed up a little. Jupiter suspected that his counterpart would now play his last trump card.

"Once I tried to make sure that the whole thing came out," said Jaubert. No one replied and his words hung strangely in the air. Jaubert sighed and then continued his self-accusation as if he had realized that even this small relief would not save him. "But then I let Adeline Hancock down."

"You're crazy," Walton snarled contemptuously. "You're gonna get us killed."

The Frenchman looked past him. "And you've been robbing me of my sleep for months."

There was another knock on the door. Hank stuck his head in. "What's going on here?" he asked cheerfully. "We're ready for you, Mr Walton. Your scholarship winners are waiting."

Without giving the group another look, the entrepreneur stepped out.

Jupiter set himself up in front of Jaubert's desk. "You gave Adeline the information she needed, didn't you?"

Jaubert nodded. "She wrote a really good story. But then..." He was looking for the right words. "When I read it in black and white, I suddenly lost my courage."

"Adeline is back in town. I spoke to her brother on the phone earlier." Jupiter looked at his watch. "They're currently visiting René in prison."

"I'm going there." Jaubert stood up determined. "Right after the scholarships are awarded." He rummaged through his papers again, jammed a folder under his arm and went out without a word.

Jupe was still holding the soil sample in his hand.

"May I see that?" Jean broke the silence.

Jupiter nodded. "But it doesn't matter," he said, telling her about the poisoned earth. Now he had to admit he was bluffing. Joan Brown followed the white lie.

"How did you get the idea to get everyone here together?" Jean wanted to know. In Pete's opinion, she made too little effort to hide her admiration.

"Adeline's article was faxed here. The question was why. It was probably not to prevent it from appearing in the newspaper." Jupiter scratched his head. "So I got the idea that she was working with Jaubert. And then I just wanted to take advantage of the element of surprise."

Jupiter smiled. "The more people, the better, I thought. Actually, Ruth and Chosmo were supposed to come too. But they have their hands full with revealing the whole truth about the blackmail case in tomorrow's *Sedona Tribune*." He winked at Pete and Bob. "... Even if it doesn't suit Mr Welles and the police at all."

Bob stood sulking in the corner with his hands buried in his trouser pockets. "I only have one wish left," he muttered.

"We do," Jupiter announced, "don't we, Bob?"

"... That you'll never do this alone again," Bob continued.

Jupiter Jones did not expect that. "You've been so keen on the tour here for the rehearsals and the concert..." he stuttered.

"The concert!" Bob cried and hit his flat hand on his forehead.

"We almost forgot," Jean added with a laugh, "but that's why we have you to remind us."

"Will the judiciary get these two now?" Jupiter asked the Director of Water Management Department as they walked from Jaubert's office to the hangar, from which enthusiastic applause could be heard.

"Depends on the lawyers," Joan Brown said.

"I've heard that before today," said the First Investigator thoughtfully. But the music was so loud that no one could hear him.